



DIOGELU CYMRU  
KEEP WALES SAFE



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Together we'll keep children and young people safe as we rebuild from Covid-19

## Non-statutory guide for practitioners

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## **Who is this practice guide for?**

This guide is primarily for practitioners working with children (up to the age of 18).

This includes those working in early years, social care, education, health, the police, youth offending and youth, community and family support services (including the third sector) and foster care and residential care.


The term 'child' is used throughout this guide to refer to a child or young person who is up to the age of 18. This is in line with the legal definition of a child as set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child also sets out the human rights of every person under the age of 18. Young people have told us through consultations that they do not like to be called children and this should be remembered when working with and recording information about young people.

We know that some services support young people who are over the age of 18 years. Most services will also come into contact with parents or family members as part of their work. This guide does not deal in details with adult safeguarding but a short section on adults at risk is included.

## About this advice

The Welsh Government has produced this non-statutory guide to remind practitioners working across agencies of their responsibilities to safeguard children and to support them in responding to concerns about children at risk.

This guide does not deal in detail with arrangements in individual agencies or settings and it should be used with any relevant policy or procedures already in place for the place where you work or volunteer.



This guide links to and should be used with the national [Wales Safeguarding Procedures](#) . You can download the procedures onto your mobile phone. Links for downloading the App are at the bottom of the landing page on the website at the link above. Once you have downloaded the App you do not need to have a Wi-Fi connection to view them.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) guarantees every child the right to grow up healthy, happy and safe. This includes the right to be protected from harm and be appropriately supported to recover from abuse. Practitioners should adopt a [Children's rights approach](#) and follow the [National Participation Standards](#).

Children are also entitled to have a voice, be listened to and have their views taken into account. This is something which children and adults who have been harmed, abused or neglected as children have said is really important in identifying risk and harm.

Children and young people are entitled to an active offer of advocacy from a statutory [Independent Professional Advocate \(IPA\)](#) when they become looked after or become the subject of child protection enquiries leading to an Initial Child Protection Conference. More information about the full children's advocacy offer can be found [here](#).

## Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) has presented new and difficult challenges for everyone. Many households have been put under strain or have faced adversity because of the social, psychological and economic impact of the pandemic and of lockdown.

We know that practitioners working across agencies in the statutory and third sector have had to adapt quickly to new ways of working, continuing to make sure that children and families get support. For some this has involved finding new ways of providing services via virtual platforms, for others face-to-face contact has continued in line with [Public Health Wales advice](#) on social distancing and PPE. At the same time, practitioners have had to try to balance work with the changes the pandemic has brought to their own homes, families and caring responsibilities.

Services have done everything they can under difficult circumstances but we know that sadly some children will have come to harm without us knowing. Providing time and space to listen directly to children supports a child-centred system and promotes good safeguarding practice. The pandemic presents new challenges to achieving this.

Children's Social Services have maintained face-to-face contact for children identified as at risk throughout the pandemic. However, the majority of children not already identified as at risk will have only had virtual contact via video, telephone or online with services from their home with family members present. This is likely to have impacted on the opportunities for practitioners to identify abuse and for children to disclose harm.



**This guide aims to assist practitioners in accessing information and advice on identifying abuse and/or supporting disclosure and reporting concerns.**

**There are also links to information and resources to support well-being and prevent abuse.**


**Many practitioners are very experienced in safeguarding practice; others may not feel as confident in this area of practice. This guide includes information that many practitioners are already aware of but we hope that pulling this together into one guide will be helpful.**

**We will also develop information for children, young people and families to encourage those who need help to speak out and get support.**

**We will also continue public facing campaigns to encourage people to report any safeguarding concerns.**

## What every practitioner should know

All practitioners working in Wales have safeguarding responsibilities towards the children and adults they work with. This includes acting in a way that does not put anyone at risk, reporting concerns that a child or adult may be at risk and making sure that action is taken about a safeguarding concern.



**You should be familiar with the contents of the Safeguarding Policy for the place where you work or volunteer. This is sometimes called a Child Protection Policy.**

**You should know how to contact the Designated Safeguarding Person for the place where you work or volunteer.**

**Children should be listened to and have their views taken into account at every stage. They should be made to feel that their needs and well-being is at the centre of decisions made about them. This does not necessarily mean they will always agree with the actions and decisions that are taken about them but that the reasons for these decisions are clearly explained to them.**

**If you have concerns that a child (up to 18) is at risk of abuse, neglect and/or harm you must report these concerns to Children's Social Services. You must also report concerns that an adult (18 or over) is at risk of abuse, neglect and/or harm to Adult's Social Services.**

**The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 places a [Duty to report](#) concerns that a child or adult is at risk on relevant safeguarding partners.**

**You can find the contact numbers for each local authority so that you can report a concern on the regional Safeguarding Board websites listed [here](#). You can also report your concerns to Police on 101.**

**If you believe that a child or adult is at immediate risk of harm you must phone the Police on 999.**

**You should never assume that someone else will report the concerns and if it is agreed that someone else will report the concerns, it is your responsibility to check that they have done this.**

**You should expect Children's Social Services or the Police to confirm to you that they will make checks about the concern you have reported.**


**You should know that information sharing supports good safeguarding practice. Fears about data protection should not stop you from sharing information in order to prevent abuse, neglect and/or harm. You should read the [guide to sharing information to safeguard children](#). A [factsheet](#) is also available.**

## Spotting the signs of harm, abuse or neglect

Some signs of abuse or neglect are easy to spot while others are not. The signs of harm, abuse or neglect are not always obvious.

The Wales Safeguarding Procedures include information to help practitioners recognise the signs of harm, abuse or neglect, some of which are particularly hidden. Extra-familial abuse and exploitation (by someone outside the family) can be difficult to identify and understand. Practitioners may also have a limited experience of abuse related to cultural practices and beliefs in some communities. The Wales Safeguarding Procedures are supported by a number of All Wales Practice Guides that provide further information about different types of abuse and neglect and how to spot the signs that a child may be at risk.

There is evidence that some protected characteristics put children at greater risk of some forms of harm and abuse. This is not a straightforward picture but **gender, sexuality, disability and ethnicity all impact on the ways in which children may be put at greater risk of some forms of harm or abuse and on the degree to which abuse may be underreported.**



[Pointers for Practice: Signs and Indicators of possible abuse, neglect and harm in a child](#) – this includes information about: Physical abuse; sexual abuse; neglect; and emotional abuse and neglect.

### All Wales Practice Guides:

[Safeguarding children from Child Criminal Exploitation \(CCE\)](#) -this include abuse related to County Lines and other forms of criminal exploitation.

[Safeguarding children from child neglect](#) – this includes information about the different forms of child neglect and ways in which these might be hidden.

[Safeguarding children from Child Sexual Exploitation \(CSE\)](#) – this includes information about spotting the signs that a child is being sexually abused through exploitation.

[Safeguarding children affected by domestic abuse](#) – this includes information about harm to children, the need to support non-abusing parents, child/adolescent on parent violence and abuse and peer relationship abuse.

[Safeguarding children from harmful practices related to tradition, culture, religion or superstition](#) – this includes Honour Based Abuse such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Forced Marriage for children (up to 18) and child abuse linked to faith or belief.

[Safeguarding children where there are concerns about Harmful Sexual Behaviour \(HSB\)](#) – this includes information about how to understand what constitutes harmful sexual behaviour in children, including online harmful sexual behaviour.

[Safeguarding children who go missing from home or care](#) - this includes information about how to decide if a child should be reported as missing and how to respond.

[Safeguarding children from online abuse](#) – this includes information on online grooming, online sexual abuse, online harmful sexual behaviour and online radicalisation.

[Safeguarding children who may be trafficked](#) – this includes information about the different reasons why children might be trafficked and specific reporting duties and support related to this form of abuse.

Children with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) status: There is Welsh Government information, advice and guidance for practitioners on supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, which is available [here](#).

Independent Child Trafficking Guardians service : Offers a 24/7 Support Line number where practitioners can seek advice, guidance and resources for all exploitation types defined within Modern Slavery Act (Criminal, Sexual, Labour, Domestic Servitude and Organ Harvesting). Telephone: 0800 043 4303

## **When to report a concern about a child at risk of harm, abuse or neglect**

Making sure that you are aware of the signs of harm, abuse or neglect is important so that you can identify that a child may be at risk.

Practitioners may only have information about a single indicator of harm, abuse or neglect. Evidence from safeguarding cases where children have been let down suggests that practitioners do not always share these kind of concerns because they are not aware that this single incident is part of a wider pattern of concerns about a child.

Reflecting on these cases, it is clear that if every practitioner who held information on a child had reported this there would have been a different response to the child. Children's Social Services need as much information as possible about an individual child in order to see the full picture and understand whether there is a need to consider a child as at risk.

Discussing any information you have with the Designated Safeguarding Person for the place where you work or volunteer, will help you in making a decision about whether the information should be reported to Children's Social Services and/or the Police.





**Make sure that you are aware of the signs of harm, abuse or neglect set out on page 3 of this guide.**

**The Wales Safeguarding Procedures include more detailed information about what to do when you have [concerns that a child is at risk](#).**

**[Pointer for Practice: Potential Barriers to Recognising and Reporting Abuse or Neglect](#) : information about some of reasons that practitioners might be reluctant about reporting concerns, that should be reported.**

**Every piece of information is important, as it is one part of the bigger picture of whether a child is at risk.**

**If you are unsure about your concerns or about what to do [seek advice](#).**

**You need to know what [information to gather to make a report](#) to Children's Social Services or to the Police.**

## **What to do if a child tells you that they or another child is or has been harmed**

When a child tells a safe adult about harm, abuse or neglect we call this making a 'disclosure'. Lots of information will refer to 'children disclosing' and 'handling disclosures'.

When a child tells you something about them being harmed or about another child being harmed, they are putting their trust in you. They have decided that you are a safe person to tell about what has happened. This means that practitioners who work with children need to be ready to listen, to really hear and see what a child is expressing and to respond in a safe way when children do make a disclosure.

It can be very hard for children to speak out about harm, abuse or neglect. The person harming them might have told them that they will get into trouble if they 'tell' or that bad things will happen to them or to people that they care about. Some children may delay telling anyone about abuse for a long time and some might never tell anyone or might not tell anyone until they are an adult.

Even if this has not happened, children will be worried about getting someone they care about from their family or someone they are friends or have a peer relationship with into trouble. Children might also worry that they will be taken away from their families, especially if the abuse is happening within their families; we call this 'intrafamilial abuse'.

When children who are harmed by someone from outside their family we call this 'extra-familial abuse'. The way in which extra-familial abuse operates means that children will often have some sort of relationship with the person(s) involved in the abuse, which is important to them and the abuser(s) are often in a position to exercise control over the child.

It is important to know that children may 'tell' by talking, through play or through their behaviour. Learning from cases where children have been let down often shows incidents where children had tried to let people know what was happening on a number of occasions, without using the words 'I am being abused'.

For some children whose first language is not English, there may be additional communication barriers to disclosing harm and it is vital the child is supported to share information using an independent/approved interpreter. It is also important to consider how culture can impact on a child's ability to recognise and disclose any harm. It is important to ensure children who may have limited English have approved interpreters present during sessions (including online) and other resources such as flash cards and translated resources are used.

Disabled and d/Deaf children may also use different language and ways of communicating their needs or expressing something that is happening to them. There is more information on this [here](#).

Many practitioners are in contact with the children they support through video, livestreaming or over the phone at this time. Advice for education practitioners on

safe livestreaming is available on the open access area of the Hwb, [here](#). While this is directed at education practitioners, the guidance includes advice that will be helpful to all practitioners.

Children may find it particularly difficult to disclose harm when they are speaking to you from their own homes via livestreaming, video chat or over the phone and when they might be overheard by someone. Advice on handling disclosures is still relevant if a child tells you about something when you are talking to them remotely. However, there are likely to be additional challenges.

It is important that you when you talking to or seeing the child remotely you still look out for any signs that cause you concern. You might notice a change in the child's mood or behaviour, it may be possible to spot physical indicators of neglect or of physical abuse or of a lack of appropriate supervision. You should take action on these concerns in the same way as you would if you were seeing the child face-to-face.

**The Wales Safeguarding Procedures include advice on what to do [when a child tells you that they or another child is or has been harmed](#).**

**[Pointers for Practice: 10 Key principles for managing disclosures of abuse and neglect](#)** : information to help you manage disclosures by children.

Have a look at the NSPCC [Let children know you're listening](#) resources which include an animation with advice about handling disclosures.

Stop it Now Cymru has resources for practitioners and families on spotting the signs of child sexual abuse and preventing abuse as part of the [What we all need to know](#) campaign.

It is a good idea to remind children at the end of a video chat, livestreaming or telephone call that if they are worried about anything they can contact Childline. They can call Childline free on 0800 1111, it won't show up on the phone bill and children don't need credit on their mobile phone to call. Let them know that if it is difficult to talk on the phone then they can [chat to a counsellor online](#). This can be introduced into the conversation in a matter of fact way, especially because Childline offers support in relation to a wide range of issues.

## What happens after you make a report about a child at risk?

The Wales Safeguarding Procedures include [information](#) about how Children's Social Services will respond to a report about a child at risk and on how you might be involved in enquiries about the child.

If the initial checks made by Children's Social Services result in a decision that there are no concerns about suspected significant harm to the child, they should notify you of this outcome and the reasons for their decision. The Wales Safeguarding Procedures include [advice](#) on keeping in communication with the child and on what to do if you disagree with the decision made.

## Young people aged over 18 and other adults

Some practitioners work with children under the age of 18 and with young people aged 18 or over. Legally anyone aged 18 or over is an adult and is subject to arrangements for safeguarding adults. However, from the perspective of individual young people this might not be clear-cut and the concerns you have about a child who is aged 17 may not go away on the day of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Practitioners working with young people coming up to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or with young adults need to know how and when to report concerns about them.

Many practitioners will also work with the parents, carers and families of the children they support. Here too, you need to know how and when to report concerns that an adult is at risk of harm or abuse.



**The Wales Safeguarding Procedures include information and advice about identifying, reporting concerns in relation to and responding to [adults at risk](#).**

**If you are concerned about a young adult or other adult in relation to trafficking, modern slavery and violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence information is available at [Live Fear Free](#).**

**You can also access the Live Fear Free helpline, a free 24-hour confidential helpline that offers support and advice to all victims of abuse and violence, regardless of gender and sexual orientation, and to “concerned others” such as practitioners, family members, friends, colleagues and members of the public. Telephone 0808 8010 800.**

**Bawso provide a 24 hour helpline that provides information, advice and support for Black & Minority Ethnic people in Wales, impacted by domestic abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, human trafficking and modern slavery. [Bawso](#) can be contacted on 0800 731 8147**

## Early help and prevention from harm, abuse and neglect

There will be children you work with who are vulnerable and who you are worried about but where you have no specific, safeguarding concerns. There will also be times when you contact Children's Social Services or the Police to report a concern and they make a decision that a child is not at risk of significant harm.

Offering early help to vulnerable children and their families is important in preventing future harm, abuse or neglect. Promoting the well-being of children can also reduce their vulnerability to harm or abuse. There are resources available online that you might find helpful or that you can share with the children and families you support. There is also information available online, about preventative services in the local authority where you practice.

## Online contact information about support services in your local authority

**Find contact information for preventative services for children and families:**

[Dewis Cymru](#) is an online service where you can search for preventive services like Families First and third sector services in the local authority where you work.

**Find contact information about services offering support in relation to Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence:** Welsh Women's Aid have information about [finding your local service](#).

## Online information, advice and links to helplines

**Helplines for children and young people:** Contact information for Childline, MEIC, Live Fear Free and the Samaritans is all available at this [link](#) on the Hwb to share with the children and young people you support.

**Coronavirus information hub for children, young people and families:** The Children's Commissioner for Wales has created an [Information hub](#) with lots of information that the children, young people and families you work with might find helpful.

**Advice for parents:** You can find information and advice for parents on the Welsh Government [Parenting give it time -stay positive](#) site.

**Advice for parents on keeping children safe during the coronavirus/Covid 19:** The NSPCC has a range of [information and advice](#) for parents and carers.

**Online safety:** The Welsh Government Hwb site has a repository of resources for practitioners and resources for you to share with children, young people and their

parents/carers in the [Online Safety Zone](#). You don't need a Hwb account to access this.

**Webinars on keeping families safe online:** The NSPCC and O2 are working in partnership to offer free 30 minute introductory webinars on keeping families safe online. The webinars highlight the risks children can face online whilst offering practical advice and signposting for help and support. To arrange a webinar, please email [parentworkshops@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:parentworkshops@nspcc.org.uk)

**All Wales School Liaison Core Programme:** [SchoolBeat.Cymru](#) is a bilingual site from the All Wales School Liaison Core Programme, providing information and resources for pupils, teachers, parents and partners to reinforce the key messages delivered by our School Community Police Officers in primary and secondary schools as well as alternative educational settings. The website focuses on the three main themes of the Programme: drug and substance misuse, personal safety and safeguarding, and social behaviour and community.

**Public Health Wales:** Public Health Wales has up to date [information](#) about the coronavirus/Covid-19 including advice for health and social care practitioners.

**ACE Aware Wales:** ACEs are Adverse Childhood Experiences and impact on children, young people and their families across Wales. Understanding and talking about ACEs is important – find out more at <https://www.aceawarewales.com/>

**Learn about ACEs:** Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) include abuse and issues that impact on households in a way that may make children especially vulnerable to abuse. The ACEs Hub now offers a free [ACE aware e-learning package](#)

**Young people's mental health:** In recognition that many young people are finding the current situation challenging we have created an online [toolkit](#) which promotes the numerous digital tools designed specifically to support young people aged 11 to 25 with their own mental health and emotional wellbeing. You don't need a Hwb account to access this. Young people can access specialist mental health services through the NHS via a referral from their GP.

**Trauma:** This [guide](#) has been written for practitioners supporting someone who has experienced traumatic events. Public Health Wales also has information on the [consequences of Covid-19 on mental health](#).

**EYST Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales –** EYST offers direct youth support to children and young people in Swansea and Cardiff and can provide advice and support to practitioners across Wales. You can find out more on their [website](#).

**Advice for refugees and asylum seekers:** The [Sanctuary website](#) has information and advice that you can share with any refugee and asylum seeking families that you work with. This includes information on [Staying Safe](#).

**Learning Disability Wales** – Learning Disability Wales has advice and information for learning disabled children, young people and adults on their [website](#) including [information about the coronavirus/Covid 19](#).

**The National Deaf Children's Society:** The National Deaf Children's Society has information, advice and resources available on their [website](#) and a [helpline for families](#).

**Stonewall Cymru** – Stonewall Cymru has a [helpline](#) for LGBT young people and adults and information about the [coronavirus/Covid 19](#).

**Galop** – Service for LGBT survivors of domestic abuse - Phone: 0800 999 5428  
[www.galop.org.uk](http://www.galop.org.uk)