

Continuum of Need

This document is for use by all practitioners working with children and their families across Dorset. It may be seen as the 'threshold document' required by [Working Together 2023](#).

The purpose of the document is to provide conversation opportunities to identify a child's degree of need and appropriate support for children and families, ensuring this support is offered by the right agencies, at the right time and to prevent their needs escalating to a higher level. It will help identify when conversations with, including referrals to specialist or statutory Children's Social Care services, are required. The document should be used alongside the [Dorset multi-agency safeguarding policy and procedures](#).

At no time must disagreement about levels of need prevent a child being safeguarded. The [Escalation Policy](#) provides guidance for those concerned that a child's needs are not recognised.

If you have any access issues with this document, please contact QAPaudits@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

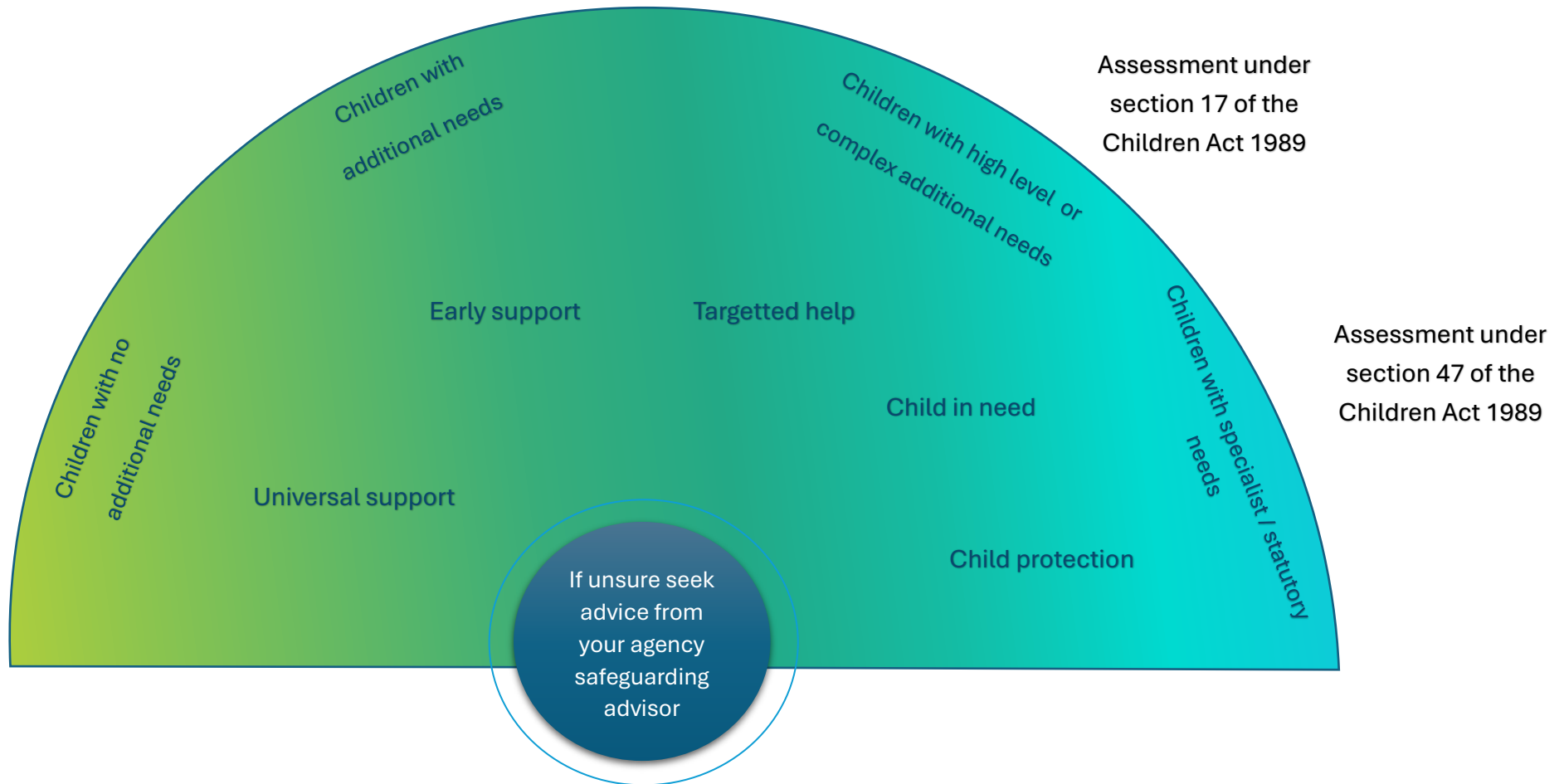
Contents:

1. Levels of vulnerability and need
2. Providing effective support to children and families
3. Key legislation regarding Children's Services support to families
4. Indicators of need
5. Sources of further information

Guidance:

- This document refers to children, but includes the unborn, infants, children and young people. Agencies will be aware of child development, rather than chronological age, in applying to individuals.
- Principles of working with children will always involve their families and networks. They will form part of the 'Team Around the Family'.
- In the majority of cases, it should be the decision of parents/carers when to ask for help or advice, but there are occasions when practitioners may need to engage them actively to help them and prevent their difficulties from becoming more serious. If seeking consent increases the risk to the child, it can be overridden.
- Children who are disabled are entitled to a Section 17 Child in Need (CiN) assessment.
- The need identified in any assessment at Early Help or Children's Social Care level may be met from across the continuum of need, ie. at different levels of vulnerability.

Levels of need and vulnerability



Providing effective support to children and families

Universal Support	<p>Children and young people are supported by their family and universal services to meet all their needs. This can include early years, education, primary health care, maternity services, public health nursing, housing, community and voluntary organisations and faith groups.</p> <p>The majority of children living in Dorset are expected to require support from universal services alone to have their needs met.</p>	<p>Support at this level should be open access and universally available. If families require advice or support to access this, <u>Dorset Family Hubs</u> can be contacted to assist.</p>
Early Support	<p>One or more services provide voluntary support that is in addition to their universal offer to meet the child or young person, and their family's emerging needs. Where multiple agencies are involved, this is coordinated through a Team around the family led by a service that knows the child/young person best. This is recorded in a Whole Family plan.</p> <p>Consent is required for the referral to & provision of support by individual services and for any multi-agency co-ordination of this support.</p> <p>The Locality may be involved in this work either through the provision of advice and guidance to the Team Around the Family, or through the provision of services through our Family Hubs (eg. Parenting Groups; Youth Work etc). Documents and resources to support provision at this level can also be found through Dorset Families Matter.</p> <p>Early Support also includes the provision of Direct Payments to support families caring for a child who has a disability through our B2SA service.</p>	<p>Practitioners should talk to the family and carry out an Early Support assessment. They should either provide single agency support if they can meet the needs this identifies or engage with other appropriate services to work with them. This should be co-ordinated through a Team around the family meeting and recorded in a whole family plan.</p> <p>Note: Dorset Children's Services do not need to be notified where this support is taking place but the Family Support and Advice Line can be contacted on 01305 228558 for advice and guidance on this.</p> <p>Dorset Family Support and Advice Line should also be contacted on 01305 228558 where assessment for direct payments is being requested.</p>

<p>Targeted Early Help</p>	<p>A multi-disciplinary Team Around the Family approach, led by a Lead Family Help Practitioner who coordinates information sharing, services and practical support to meet the child or young person's and their family's needs, where these are multiple, interconnected and may escalate without a coordinated multi-agency service intervention and direct support to the family in their home. This may also include where there are specific support needs for a family with a child with a disability.</p> <p>Consent is required for the referral to & provision of support by individual services and for any multi-agency co-ordination of this support.</p>	<p>If you believe a family require this level of support, please gain consent from the family and then contact the Family Support and Advice Line on 01305 228558 for discussion about support and identification of a lead practitioner.</p> <p>The following process charts are available to show the pathway from this point:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When a child is referred.vsd 2. Family Help Pathway.vsd
<p>Child in Need</p>	<p>A child in need is defined under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired without the provision of services, or a child who is disabled.</p> <p>To fulfil this duty, practitioners undertake assessments of the needs of individual children, giving due regard to a child's age and understanding when determining what, if any, services to provide. Where assessment identifies support is required at this level, this will be multi-disciplinary help and protection, led and co-ordinated by a Lead Family Help Practitioner with a Child or young person & their family.</p>	<p>If you identify a child or young person thought to require this level of assessment or support contact the Family Support and Advice Line on 01305 228558 for discussion about support and identification of a lead practitioner.</p> <p>Consent is required for the referral to & provision of support under child in need and for any multi-agency co-ordination of this support.</p> <p>The following process charts are available to show the pathway from this point:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When a child is referred.vsd 2. Family Help Pathway.vsd
<p>Child Protection & Specialist CiC</p>	<p>Children who need protecting may include those who experience harm in their own family and those who are harmed or exploited by others, including their peers, in their community and/or online. Suffering or being likely to suffer significant harm is the threshold for child protection enquiries and can take different forms, including sexual, physical or emotional abuse, neglect or domestic abuse (including controlling or coercive behaviour), exploitation by criminal gangs or organised crime groups, trafficking, online abuse, sexual exploitation, and the influences of extremism which could lead to radicalisation.</p>	<p>If you identify a child or young person you believe to have suffered or be at risk of significant harm, a safeguarding conversation should take place with the Family Advice And Support Line immediately on 01305 228558. Consent is required unless you believe seeking this would place the child or others at increased risk of significant harm. In an emergency, the agency should call 999.</p> <p>The following process charts are available to show the pathway from this point:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When a child is referred.vsd

Key legislation regarding Children's Services support to families

[Section 10 and 11 of the Children Act \(2004\)](#) sets out how local authority Children's Services and other agencies and bodies need to work together effectively to protect and promote the welfare of children in the UK, this includes through the offer of early help services to children and families.

[Child in Need Section 17 of the Children Act \(1989\)](#) states that a child shall be considered in need if:

- They are unlikely to achieve, maintain or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by a local authority.
- Their health and development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provisions of such services and/or;
- They are disabled.

[Child Protection Section 47 of the Children Act 1989](#) states that the authority shall make necessary enquiries to enable them to decide whether they should take action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare where there is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.

[Children Looked After by the Local Authority Part III Children Act 1989](#) outlines the support for children and families provided by Local Authorities in England. Examples where a child is looked after by a Local Authority include:

- [An Emergency Protection Order \(Section 44 Children Act 1989\)](#) if the child is likely to suffer significant harm if not removed to Local Authority care.
- Being provided with accommodation under [Section 20 of the Children Act 1989](#); duty to accommodate a child, for more than 24 hours with the agreement of the parents or of the child if s/he is aged 16 or over.
- [A Care Order \(Section 31 of the Children Act 1989; care and supervision orders\)](#)
- Being remanded by a criminal court to Local Authority Accommodation or Youth Detention Accommodation under [Chapter 3 Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012](#). There are national standards for children in the youth justice system which outlines the minimum expectations for all agencies to provide statutory services to children in the youth justice system [Standards for children in the youth justice system - GOV.UK](#)

Potential Indicators of Need

- Note: This is an illustrative list of potential indicators that provide conversation opportunities to identify appropriate support for children and families
- It is important to know that this list is not exhaustive, indicators do cross between different levels of need, as illustrated by the columns without headings.

	Universal	↔	Early Support	↔	Targeted Early Help	↔	Child in Need	↔	Child Protection
Childs Developmental Needs	Is generally physically well, Nutritious diet, Adequate hygiene and dress.		Few positive relationships No access to books/toys		Self-harming behaviours Relationships with carers characterised by unpredictability Evident mental health needs Serious or persistent offending behaviour		Unsafe sexual activity Persistent and/or high-risk episodes of missing Child/young person is out of education or not receiving education due to parental neglect Unaccompanied		Disclosure or suspicion of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect Non-accidental injury and/or unexplained injury, particularly in non-mobile children Puts self or others in danger Serious decay from persistent
Health, Learning, Emotional and Behavioural Development, Identity, Relationships	Development and health reviews /immunisations up to date. Developmental milestones and motor skills reviewed. Good mental Health	Pregnancy with complications or impact of parental lifestyle Has some identified additional learning needs Has some difficulties sustaining relationships Finds accepting responsibility for own actions difficult	Concerns about developmental progress: e.g. overweight/underweight bedwetting/soiling Missing some routine and non-routine health appointments May experience bullying or be exhibiting bullying behaviour	Disability prevents self-care in a significant range of tasks Ongoing, challenging behaviour at school, possible risk of exclusion Consistently poor education attendance and punctuality Consistently not reaching educational potential	Chronic/recurring health difficulties are not treated or are badly managed Serious professional concern; family declining services Child lacks a sense of safety and as a result often finds him/herself in dangerous situations Starting to commit offences/re-offend Child reported missing from home Developmental milestones are not		Allegation of abuse/physical injury caused by a professional Refusing medical care endangering life/development Failure to thrive, likely to be due to care provided		

	<p>Good quality early relationships.</p> <p>Able to adapt to change Understands others' feelings.</p> <p>Takes responsibility for behaviour.</p> <p>Sexual activity is age-appropriate.</p> <p>Responds appropriately to boundaries and constructive guidance.</p> <p>Can discriminate between safe and unsafe contacts.</p> <p>Has positive self-image</p> <p>Stable and affectionate relationships with family</p>	<p>Minor concerns re diet, hygiene or clothing</p> <p>Dental difficulties untreated/some decay Vulnerable to emotional difficulties, perhaps in response to life events such as parental separation</p> <p>Child appears anxious, angry or phobic</p> <p>Delay in reaching developmental milestones</p> <p>Distances self from others</p> <p>Language and communication difficulties</p> <p>Some insecurities re identity eg. low self-esteem, lack</p>	<p>Disability limits amount of self-care possible</p> <p>Lack of positive role models</p> <p>Not reaching education potential</p> <p>a child/young person who has special educational needs (whether or not they have a statutory education, health and care (EHC) plan)</p> <p>a child/young person who is disabled</p>	<p>Emerging mental health issues e.g. anxiety, depression, eating disorder</p> <p>Poor punctuality/pattern of regular education absences/extended term exclusions</p> <p>Potential support need where a child has previously returned home to their family from care</p> <p>a child/young person who is viewing problematic and/or inappropriate online content (for example, linked to violence), or developing</p>	<p>Significantly poor self-image/identity</p> <p>Persistent and significant disruptive/challenging behaviour at school, home or in the community</p> <p>Young carer with development compromised through caring role</p> <p>Relationships with family experienced as negative ('low warmth, high criticism')</p> <p>Age inappropriate</p>	<p>being met due to parental care</p> <p>Changed behaviour, reference to radicalised thoughts/threats to act</p>	<p>refugee/asylum seeker</p> <p>Child involved with serious, persistent, high risk substance misuse Physical/learning disability needing constant supervision</p> <p>Presentation (including hygiene) significantly impacts on relationships</p> <p>Privately fostered</p> <p>Rejection by a parent/carer, family no longer willing to care for, or have abandoned</p>	<p>Seriously obese/seriously underweight</p> <p>Dangerous sexual activity and/or early teenage pregnancy</p> <p>Suspected risk of Female Genital Mutilation</p> <p>Child displaying sexually harmful or abusive behaviour</p> <p>Acute mental health difficulties e.g. severe depression or risk of suicide</p>	<p>lack of dental care</p> <p>Unborn baby impacted in utero by neglect/abuse</p>
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	<p>Able to make and maintain friendships</p> <p>Access to books and toys is provided with appropriate education and learning</p> <p>Enjoys and participates in learning activities</p> <p>Has experiences of success and achievement</p> <p>Sound links between home and education provider</p> <p>Planning for career/ adult life</p> <p>Unborn with needs met</p>	<p>of confidence, sexuality, gender identity</p> <p>Showing early signs of anti-social behaviour/offending</p> <p>Experiments with tobacco/alcohol/ illegal drugs</p> <p>Some difficulties with adult or peer relationships e.g. 'clingy', anxious or withdrawn</p> <p>Limited engagement in play with others/has few or no friends</p> <p>Not always engaged in play/learning, poor concentration</p>		<p>inappropriate relationships online</p> <p>a child/young person who is bereaved</p>	sexualised behaviour		child/young person		
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<p>Parenting Capacity & Family</p> <p>Basic Care, Ensuring Safety, Emotional Warmth, Stimulation, Guidance and Boundaries, Stability</p>	<p>Provide for child's physical needs, e.g. food, drink, equipment, appropriate clothing, medical and dental care</p> <p>Protection from danger or harm</p> <p>Shows warm regard, praise and encouragement</p> <p>Ensures stable relationships</p> <p>Ensure the child can develop a sense of right and wrong</p> <p>Child/young person accesses play/activities/leisure facilities as appropriate to age and interests</p>	<p>Inconsistent responses to child/young person</p> <p>Parent/carer offers inconsistent boundaries</p> <p>No effective support from extended family.</p> <p>Low level parental substance misuse</p> <p>Parents struggling to have their own emotional needs met</p> <p>Provides limited access to new experiences or leisure activities</p>	<p>Parent/carer stresses starting to affect ability to ensure child's safety</p> <p>Unnecessary or frequent visits to doctor/casualty</p> <p>Parent/carer requires advice on parenting issues</p> <p>Basic care is not consistently provided</p> <p>Inappropriate child care arrangements and/or too many carers=</p>	<p>Parents sometimes find it difficult to positively resolve conflict in their relationship</p> <p>Lack of routine in the home</p>	<p>Exposed to domestic abuse or chronic parental conflict within the household or family.</p> <p>A child/young person is taking on a caring role in relation to their parent/carer or is looking after younger siblings.</p> <p>Child has multiple carers, some of whom may have no significant relationship with them.</p> <p>Parents are consistently unable to act as</p>		<p>Severe disability – parents who require additional support and breaks in care to meet care needs</p> <p>Request for child to be accommodated</p> <p>Parent says someone is/has harmed their child</p> <p>Pregnant parents/carers who have been unable to care for previous children</p> <p>No effective boundaries set by parents/carers</p>	<p>Child beyond parental control</p> <p>Parent's mental health difficulties or substance misuse affect care of child/young person</p> <p>Parental substance misuse impacts on ability to consistently meet child's needs</p> <p>Contact with individual posing a suspected or known risk to children</p>	<p>Non-compliance of parents/carers with services where risk of harm to child has been identified</p> <p>Family home used for drug taking, sex trade or other illegal activities</p> <p>Suspected/evidence of fabricated or induced illness / perplexing presentation</p> <p>Chronic and serious domestic abuse in the home.</p> <p>Parent/carer's mental health or substance misuse significantly affects care of child</p> <p>Persistent and high-risk</p>
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	Good relationships within family, including when parents are separated				positive role models Some exposure to dangerous situations in the home or community Parents do not provide access to positive experiences Parents unable to set effective boundaries e.g. too loose/tight		Parents/carers own needs mean they are unable to keep child/young person safe Child has no-one to care for him/her		parental substance misuse Parents/carers involved in violent or serious crime or criminal offences against children Parent/carer is failing to provide safe physical care or emotional support to child
Environmental and Contextual Factors Community, Social	Accommodation has basic amenities and appropriate facilities to meet family needs Managing budget to meet		Parents/carers have limited formal education or are impacted by other disadvantage Difficulty accessing community facilities	Family have physical and mental health difficulties impacting on their child Low income or financial/debt difficulties/	Emerging behaviours which are seen as being anti-social or violent Child subject to persistent	Unsuitable accommodation/intentionally homeless Homeless, or imminent homelessness if not accepted by housing department	Extreme poverty/debt impacting on ability to care for child Child/young person is at risk of	Child/young person persistently involved with the supply of illegal substances	Home conditions are dangerous or seriously threatening to health

Integration, Income and Employment	individual needs Is able to access local services and amenities		Not in education, employment or training post-16 Periods of unemployment of parent/carer	rent arrears Community is hostile to family. Known to be at risk of exploitation, sexual exploitation, violence, criminality or radicalisation Some social exclusion or conflict experiences or victim of crime or bullying Child experiences persistent discriminatio n which is internalised and reflected in poor self- image Home conditions present a risk to child's safety or health	discriminat ion, e.g. racial, sexual, disability Parent/car er serving a prison sentence	Chronic unemployment or poverty that severely affected parents' ability to meet the child's needs Child/young person is known to be carrying weapons	radicalisati on Physical accommod ation places child in danger Family seeking asylum or are refugees	Child/you ng person is assessed as at risk of sexual or criminal exploitati on, including through trafficking , cuckooing , County Lines or modern day slavery Child/you ng person has known involveme nt with gangs or organised crime group	
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				Child who is showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, including being affected by gangs, county lines, organised crime groups and/or serious violence including knife crime					
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Sources of further information:

1. How we Do things in Dorset Guidance

(link to be added)

2. Dorset Family Support And Advice Line (including children's Social Care and Family Help Hub:

Telephone number – 01305 228558

childrensadvicelandduty@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

(from 03/02/2025 please use :familysupportandadvice@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk instead of above email)

Referral via telephone consultation, no requirement to complete inter-agency referral form.

3. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

- [CAMHS Gateway – CAMHS Dorset](#)
 - [Referral Guidance](#)
 - [Referral form](#)
- If you are over 18, please visit the Steps2Wellbeing website where you will find information about this service and how to access it. For urgent mental health support, please call our Connection service which is open 24/7. Dorset residents or people visiting Dorset can call direct on 0800 652 0190 at local call rate or access via NHS 111 for free. More information on our Access Mental Services is available on the Dorset HealthCare website.
 - As part of CAMHS Gateway, the service is available for self-referral for young people aged 16-18 years old. [Visit the Dorset HealthCare website to complete the self-referral form.](#)[Visit the Dorset HealthCare website to complete the self-referral form.](#)

4. Dorset Health visiting duty line

01305 361071 (West) 01929 557593 (East)

5. Dorset Family Hubs

[Family Hub - Dorset Council](#)

6. Pan-Dorset Multi-Agency Safeguarding Policies and Procedures Manual

[Pan-Dorset Multi-Agency Safeguarding Policies and Procedures Manual](#)

Includes: Making a Good Referral, Information Sharing Guidance and the Escalation Policy

7. Government Guidance

- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 \(Statutory Guidance\)](#)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#)