

[Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](#)

This Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance sets out what organisations and agencies who have functions relating to children must and should do to help, protect and promote the welfare of all children and young people under the age of 18 in England. The 2023 edition replaces Working together to safeguard children 2018, which underwent a limited factual update in 2020.

This new edition of Working together is central to delivering on the strategy set out in [Stable homes, built on love \(2023\)](#) which outlines the Government's commitment to support every child to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home.

Alongside the Working Together statutory guidance, the Government published:

- an updated Working together [statutory framework](#), which sets out the legislation relevant to safeguarding
- the [Children's social care national framework](#), which sets out expectations for senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners in local authorities
- guidance on [Improving practice with children, young people and families](#), which provides advice for local areas on embedding the Working together guidance and the Children's social care national framework in practice.

Key updates introduced in [Working together to safeguard children 2023: a guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children](#) are around multi-agency expectations for all practitioners, working with parents and families, the roles and responsibilities of safeguarding partners the role of education and childcare providers, multi-agency practice standards, support for disabled children tackling harm outside the home.

Chapter 1: A shared responsibility

This new chapter in the guidance highlights how positive outcomes for children depend on strong multi-agency working across the whole system of help, support and protection including effective work from all agencies with parents, carers, and families

Multi agency expectations for all practitioners

The guidance introduces a set of multi-agency expectations for all practitioners involved in safeguarding and child protection. These expectations aim to ensure that practitioners:

share the same goals

learn with and from each other

have what they need to help families

acknowledge and appreciate difference

challenge each other

- The expectations apply to all agencies and practitioners involved in safeguarding and protecting children. Specifically, these include police, local authorities, health services, probation, youth offending service, education and childcare settings, and voluntary and third sector organisations.
- The term practitioners used refers to all those working in these services and settings.

- The expectations are structured at three levels: **strategic leaders**, **senior and middle managers** and **direct practice**.

Strategic leaders may include	Senior and middle managers may include	Those in direct practice may include
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Executives of local authorities or the integrated care board; • Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners; • Chief Executives of NHS Trusts • Chief Executives of multi-academy trusts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors of Children's Services • Heads of services and team managers in LAs • Designated and named professionals (GP, nurse, doctor, midwife) in health; • Chief Superintendent and Chief Inspector (and equivalents) in police; • head teachers, designated safeguarding leads and nursery managers in education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frontline social workers, • health visitors, • police constables, • teachers • those working in the voluntary and community sector.

The professions listed as examples for each level is not exhaustive, decision-making structures will differ by area, and local areas should consider how best to apply these standards to match their local approach.

Multi-agency practice principles for **strategic leaders** are:

- **Collaborate:** Leaders develop a shared vision for how their services work together to deliver shared goals
- **Learn:** Leaders use evidence from direct practice in their area so that they know and can evaluate what is and isn't working well for children and families
- **Resource:** Leaders are ambitious about helping, supporting and protecting children in their area and jointly prioritise and share resources accordingly
- **Include:** Leaders create an inclusive culture where diversity is understood, and multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working is celebrated
- **Mutual challenge:** Leaders hold each other and their teams to account and are held to account by their teams for the quality of the partnership-working

Multi-agency practice principles for **senior and middle managers** are:

- **Collaborate:** Decisions are based on a shared practice approach and constructive debate and analysis of information from all services
- **Learn:** Managers ensure their teams have time to engage in peer-learning and knowledge-exchange, peer-audit, group supervision and observation
- **Resource:** Managers ensure children receive the holistic support they need, drawing in expertise from a wide range of agencies
- **Include:** Managers support staff to identify and challenge bias, discrimination, inequality and negative stereotypes
- **Mutual challenge:** Constructive challenge within and across agencies and disciplines is actively encouraged. Independent judgements are valued and given space alongside collective decision-making to avoid confirmation bias and groupthink

Multi-agency practice principles for **direct practice** are:

- **Collaborate:** Practitioners working with the same child and family share information to get a complete picture of what life is like for the child. Collectively, they ensure the child's voice is at the centre and the right support is provided
- **Learn:** Practitioners learn together by drawing on the best available evidence from their individual fields and sharing their diverse perspectives during regular shared reflection on a child's development, experiences and outcomes
- **Resource:** Practitioners build strong relationships across agencies and disciplines to ensure they support and protect the children with whom they work
- **Include:** Practitioners recognise the differences between, and are confident to respond to, circumstances where children experience adversity due to poverty and acute family stress, and situations where children face harm due to parental abuse and neglect
- **Mutual challenge:** Practitioners challenge themselves and each other, question each other's assumptions, and seek to resolve differences of opinion in a restorative and respectful way

Working with parents and carers

The updated guidance sets out **four principles** that professionals should follow when working with parents and carers:

1

effective partnership and the importance of building strong, positive, trusting and co-operative relationships

2

respectful, non-blaming, clear and inclusive verbal and non-verbal communication that is adapted to the needs of parents and carers

3

empowering parents and carers to participate in decision making by equipping them with information, keeping them updated and directing them to further resources

4

involving parents and carers in the design of processes and services that affect them.

Chapter 2: Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

The updated guidance outlines new roles and responsibilities relating to the three safeguarding partners (the local authority, the police and the health service). The head of each statutory safeguarding partner will be referred to as the **lead safeguarding partner** (LSP), who will in turn appoint a **delegated safeguarding partner** (DSP).

It introduces a **partnership chair** role, emphasises the role of education in safeguarding arrangements and strengthens accountability by clarifying expectations for information-sharing, independent scrutiny, funding, and reporting.

No statutory roles or functions have been removed from the guidance.

Lead safeguarding partner (LSP)

- ❑ The LSP is the head of each statutory safeguarding partner agency. For local authorities, for example, the LSP should be the Head of Paid Service, also known as the Chief Executive.
- ❑ The LSP is responsible for holding their own organisation or agency to account, speaking and making decisions on behalf of their agency, and meeting the statutory and legislative duties of their agency.
- ❑ LSPs from different agencies are jointly responsible for the proper involvement of all relevant agencies, and should work as a team, as opposed to as a voice for their own organisation.

They should meet sufficiently regularly to undertake the following core functions: (Through what mechanism and how often is for local decision)

Joint functions of lead safeguarding partners (LSP)

1. Set the strategic direction, vision, and culture of the local safeguarding arrangements, including agreeing and reviewing shared priorities and the resource required to deliver services effectively.
2. Lead their organisation's individual contribution to the shared priorities, ensuring strong governance, accountability and reporting mechanisms to hold their delegates to account for the delivery of agency commitments.
3. Review and sign off key partnership documents: published multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including plans for independent scrutiny; shared annual budget; yearly report; and local threshold document.
4. Provide shared oversight of learning from independent scrutiny, serious incidents, LCSPRs and national reviews ensuring recommendations are implemented and have a demonstrable impact on practice (as set out in the yearly report).
5. Ensure multi-agency arrangements have the necessary level of business support, including intelligence and analytical functions, such as an agreed data set providing oversight and a robust understanding of practice.
6. Ensure all relevant agencies (including education settings) are clear on their role and contribution to multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

Delegated safeguarding partner (DSP) and partnership chair

- ❑ The LSP of each partner agency should appoint a delegated safeguarding partner (DSP) responsible for operational delivery.
- ❑ One DSP within the partnership should be appointed partnership chair for multi-agency arrangements. This role can be rotated between the DSPs if deemed appropriate by the LSPs.
- ❑ The partnership chair should facilitate partner discussions, provide greater continuity, and act as a single point of contact for the partnership.
- ❑ The role of partnership chair should not replace existing formal complaints procedures and does not provide independent scrutiny.
- ❑ This arrangement removes the need for a local area to maintain another chair or independent chair.

DSPs should meet sufficiently frequently to undertake the following joint functions:

Joint functions of delegated safeguarding partners (DSP)

1. Delivery and monitoring of multi-agency priorities and procedures to protect and safeguard children in the local area, in compliance with published arrangements and thresholds.
2. Close partnership working and engagement with education (at strategic and operational level) and other relevant agencies, allowing better identification of and response to harm.
3. The implementation of effective information-sharing arrangements between agencies, including data sharing that facilitates joint analysis between partner agencies.
4. Delivery of high-quality and timely Rapid Reviews and LCSPRs, with the impact of learning from local and national reviews and independent scrutiny clearly evidenced in yearly reports.
5. The provision of appropriate multi-agency safeguarding professional development and training.
6. Seeking of, and responding to, feedback from children and families about their experiences of services and co-designing services to ensure children from different communities and groups can access the help and protection they need.

Functions of Partnership Chair role

- To develop strategic links, support and hold to account all LSPs in fulfilling their safeguarding duties for children.
- Ensure that local arrangements are designed to work collaboratively and effectively by encouraging and supporting the development of partnership working between the LSPs, DSPs, independent scrutiny role and MASA subgroups.
- Chair the meetings of the DSPs, including any additional meetings convened as a response to specific and exceptional circumstances, with the help of the business manager and independent scrutiny role.
- Offer appropriate challenge to ensure that the partners are accountable, and that the local arrangements operate effectively.

Functions of independent scrutiny role

- Provide safeguarding partners and relevant agencies with independent, rigorous, and effective support and challenge at both a strategic and operational level.
- Provide assurance to the whole system in judging the effectiveness of the multiagency safeguarding arrangements through a range of scrutiny methods.
- Ensure that statutory duties are being fulfilled, quality assurance mechanisms are in place, and that local child safeguarding practice reviews and national reviews are analysed, with key learning areas identified and effectively implemented across the safeguarding system.
- Ensure that the voice of children and families is considered as part of scrutiny and that this is at the heart of arrangements through direct feedback, informing policy and practice.
- Be regarded as a 'critical friend' and provide opportunities for two-way discussion and reflection between frontline practitioners and leaders. This will encourage and enable strong, clear, strategic leadership.
- Provide independent advice when there are disagreements between agencies and safeguarding partners and facilitate escalation procedures.
- Evaluate and contribute to multi-agency safeguarding published arrangements and the annual report, alongside feeding into the wider accountability systems such as inspections.

Schools, colleges and education providers

- ❑ It is recommended that LSPs have a representative from the education sector present at strategic discussions.
- ❑ It is expected that all local education and childcare providers working with children up to the age of 18 will be included in local arrangements.
- ❑ LSPs should consider including voluntary, charity, social enterprise (VCSE) organisations, childcare settings, and sports clubs in their arrangements.

Accountability and transparency

- ❑ Strengthens wording on accountability by clarifying expectations around information sharing, independent scrutiny, funding and reporting.
- ❑ Clarifies what is needed in published strategic plans and yearly reports and sets a date by for yearly reports to be submitted to encourage greater consistency and transparency across local areas.
- ❑ Gives some examples of the types of costs that exist in multi-agency arrangements and places greater emphasis on the review and reporting of finances.

Safeguarding partners should have an agreement in place which outlines how information is shared safely and effectively between themselves and other relevant agencies.

Annual reports to be submitted by the end of September every year, starting from 2024, and should be reflective of work undertaken the previous year.

LSP should agree on the level of funding needed to deliver the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including the costs of core functions, such as LCSPR, multi-agency training and learning events, resourcing agreed initiatives and priorities, independent scrutiny and analytical and business support. Funding should be equitable and reviewed regularly.

Chapter 3: Providing help, support and protection

This revision has a renewed focus on how organisations and agencies provide help, safeguarding and protection for children and their families. There are three sections: Early help, Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and Child protection.

Section 1: Early Help

Considering family needs in the context of early help

- ❑ Assessments for early help should consider how the needs of different family members impact each other. This includes needs relating to education, mental and physical health, financial stability, housing, substance use and crime.
- ❑ Specific needs should be considered such as disabilities, those whose first language isn't English, fathers or male carers, and parents who identify as LGBTQ.

- Early help services may focus on improving family functioning and developing the family's capacity to establish positive routines and solve problems. Where family networks are supporting the child and parents, services may take an approach that enables family group decision making, such as family group conferences.

The role of education and childcare settings

- Safeguarding professionals should work closely with education and childcare settings to share information, identify and understand risks of harm, and ensure children and families receive timely support.

Section 2: Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children

Children's social care assessments

- Assessments should consider the parenting capacity of both resident or non-resident parents and carers, as well as any other adult living in the household that can respond to the child's needs.
- Assessments should also consider the influence of the child's family network and any other adults living in the household, as well as the impact of the wider community and environment.

Lead practitioners

- A lead practitioner will be allocated by the local authority and their partners once a referral has been accepted.
- The lead practitioner role can be held by a range of people, including social workers. For child protection enquiries, the lead practitioner should always be a social worker.
- The lead practitioner will have the appropriate skills, knowledge and capacity to carry out assessments, undertake direct work with families and co-ordinate services.

Supporting disabled children and their carers

- Assessments of disabled children should focus on the specific needs of the child and family, be strengths-based and gather effective information to support the best outcome for the child and family.
- Local authorities should implement a Designated Social Care Officer (DCSO) role to improve links between the social care services and the special educational needs and disability (SEND) system.

Harm outside the home

- Practitioners should consider the needs, experiences and vulnerabilities of the individuals or groups who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, harm outside the home – including from criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation or serious violence.
- Practitioners should work with relevant partner agencies to consider the influence of groups or individuals perpetrating the harm.
- Professionals should assess whether a child who is experiencing, or is at risk of experiencing, harm outside the home is in need under section 17 or 47 of the [Children Act 1989](#).

Section 3: Child protection

National multi-agency practice standards

The updated guidance introduces new multi-agency practice standards for all practitioners working in services and settings that come into contact with children who may be suffering or have suffered significant harm within or outside the home.

Chapter 4: Operational responsibilities

The guidance introduces changes that emphasise the advantages of prison and probation services exchanging information with children’s social care and other agencies.

Chapter 5: Learning from serious child safeguarding incidents

Although not a statutory requirement, the guidance notes how local authorities should “notify the Secretary of State for Education and OFSTED of the death of a care leaver up to and including the age of 24.” If local partners think there may be learning to be gained from the death of a looked after child or care leaver even if the criteria for a serious incident are not met, they may wish to conduct a local safeguarding practice review.

Chapter 6: Child Death Reviews

Factual changes only (covered in [appendix 1](#)).

Responding to working together to safeguard children

Local areas should reflect on how to strengthen multi-agency working across the whole system of help, support and protection for children and their families, and children’s social care, as part of a single system.

Leaders should review their current arrangements and identify what reforms need to be made to comply with statutory guidance. Local areas are expected to publish updated arrangements in December 2024.

Next steps for safeguarding partners

After reading [working together to safeguard children](#), safeguarding partners for every local area should:

1. commit to reviewing multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
 2. identify where improvements may be needed to strengthen services to deliver the best possible outcomes for children, young people and families
 3. identify and agree named lead and delegate safeguarding partners for each statutory agency, after reviewing the functions listed in chapter 2 of working together to safeguard children
 4. appoint one of the delegated safeguarding partners as the partnership chair for the multi-agency arrangements
 5. remove the role of independent chair (if this is still in place)
 6. consider the role of education partners within the partnership structure and strengthen this where necessary
 7. publish and submit a yearly report by September 2024 and publish revised multi-agency arrangements by December 2024
 8. implement effective information-sharing arrangements between agencies
- Partners must also agree how the core functions of the partnership chair and independent scrutiny will be delivered and amend structures and arrangements as necessary.
 - The lead and delegate safeguarding partners must ensure there is independent scrutiny to evaluate how effective multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are.

- ❑ Safeguarding partners should review funding arrangements to ensure that agencies are contributing enough to support the decision-making infrastructure and statutory requirements of local arrangements.
- ❑ They should review current ways of working to support effective practice as set out in the multi-agency expectations, principles for working with parents and carers and the multi-agency child protection standards.

Responding to the national framework

Local authorities have a 12-month period, from 15 December 2023 to 20 December 2024, to:

- ❑ begin the work to embed the [national framework](#)
- ❑ make plans for how they align practice systems to the expectations for children’s social care

Next steps for local authority senior leaders¹

After reading the [national framework](#), **senior leaders** should:

1. champion the national framework within the local authority and encourage their workforce to read and understand what it means for practice
2. commit to the highest aspirations for the outcomes of children, young people and families being supported by children’s social care, including children in or leaving care
3. assess how ambitious local practice is, how far local practice culture reflects the principles for practice, what barriers need to be overcome, and what support might be needed to achieve this
4. seek opportunities to engage with children, young people and families to explore innovative ways to capture feedback and how this should be used to inform practice change and improvements
5. use the national framework to support self-assessments, peer challenge exercises and sector-led improvement delivered through the regional improvement and innovation alliances, highlight any gaps that may need to be addressed and reflect these in local and regional improvement plans
6. review what it means for existing multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
7. work in collaboration with all partner agencies to ensure there is a shared understanding and plan how to change and strengthen practice
8. recognise the importance of the system enablers in ensuring the workforce and partner agencies work in conditions that allow the outcomes to be effectively met

Senior leaders should consider how to implement recommendations of published practice guides for practice interventions and approaches that are shown to achieve the outcomes set out in the national framework.

Next steps for practice supervisors²

After reading the [national framework](#), **practice supervisors** should:

¹ The term senior leader generally refers to: local political leaders, typically lead members for children’s services, local authority chief executives, directors and assistant directors of children’s services, heads of services, virtual school heads.

² Practice supervisors generally include: service managers, team managers, principal social workers.

1. refresh aspirations for children, young people and families, and reflect on what the expectations for practice mean for themselves and their teams
2. work with senior leaders to understand how practice systems could be reviewed and strengthened to align to outcomes of the national framework
3. support teams and practitioners to discuss the national framework and what it means for practice
4. agree how the outcomes and expectations for practice can be used to support reflection on how far practice is impactful as part of reflective supervision
5. work with practitioners to explore how the national framework might be used to support and focus continuous professional development
6. identify learning opportunities for teams and individuals where there are gaps in knowledge, skills and experience
7. work with senior leaders and practitioners to embed the principles set out in the enablers, so the right conditions are in place for the workforce to effectively meet the outcomes

Practice supervisors should seek opportunities to engage with children, young people and families and develop innovative ways to capture feedback to inform practice. They should promote this to practitioners, and share their findings with senior leaders to consider how it might shape both practice and culture change.

Next steps for practitioners³

After reading the [national framework](#), **practitioners** should:

1. refresh aspirations for children, young people and families and consider how the expectations for practice should change the support being offered to families
2. share views with senior leaders and practice supervisors on how practice could be strengthened to align to outcomes of the national framework
3. reflect on how the national framework might aid continuous professional development
4. identify learning opportunities to improve knowledge, skills and experience
5. draw on engagement with children, young people and families to explore innovative ways to capture feedback and how this can be used to inform practice
6. take an active role in capturing and sharing this feedback with leaders
7. raise awareness and support children, young people and families to understand the national framework, drawing on the children and young people's version

Practitioners will also need to reflect on current support plans for children, young people and families and how they align to the national framework. Here they can identify what might need to change to achieve outcomes.

They should use it to collaborate with peers and practice supervisors to discuss how the national framework can be used as part of practice reflection, reflective supervision, and peer discussions to aid decision making.

See: [Improving practice with children, young people and families](#)

³ This generally refers to: child and family social workers, senior child social work practitioners, family support workers, personal advisors for care leavers, practitioners from other disciplines including those with expertise in specific fields such as domestic abuse and substance misuse.

Appendix 1: Factual Changes

Introduction

- ❑ Adds Domestic Abuse Act 2021 legislation and the National Framework statutory guidance to the list of guidance that supports a child-centred approach.
- ❑ Removes references to clinical commissioning groups and replaces with integrated care boards throughout guidance.

Chapter 1

- ❑ Updates to information sharing references to correct factual inaccuracies and reflect existing guidance.

Chapter 3

- ❑ Includes reference to young carers now recorded in school census, to reflect change in policy.
- ❑ Includes information on the pre-proceedings stage of the child protection process, to reflect existing guidance.

Chapter 4

- ❑ Clarifies roles and responsibilities of health practitioners with specific duties for child safeguarding.
- ❑ Updates to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) section to reflect existing statutory MAPPA guidance.
- ❑ Updates to the armed services section to reflect MOD responsibilities/changes to internal structures and processes.
- ❑ Removes reference to secure colleges and referencing secure children's homes and secure schools.
- ❑ Removes references to Public Health England.

Chapter 5

- ❑ Clarifies the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel carry out thematic reviews, Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review process and signposting to panel guidance for clarity on serious safeguarding cases.
- ❑ Clarifies the process for submitting serious incidents notifications and the importance of accuracy to support data, reporting and learning.

Chapter 6

- ❑ Replaces reference 'Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) framework' with Child Death Review Statutory and Operational Guidance (2018)
- ❑ Modifies language around the child death review process where the death of a child occurs in an area outside where the child usual resides.
- ❑ Reflects new guidance of coroner's duty to include post-mortem reports with relevant child death review.
- ❑ Reflects change of name by removing independent review by child death review partners and replacing with child death overview panel.
- ❑ Modifies the language around the responsibility of professionals where relevant, to inform relevant safeguarding partners and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel

Appendix A - Glossary

- ❑ Reflects new definitions, legislation, and policies where appropriate.
- ❑ Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan wording reflects reference to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 0-25 (2015) to reflect legislation.

Appendix B

- ❑ New links to resource packs on female genital mutilation, forced marriage, sexual abuse, online safety, the child protection companion, and independent scrutiny and local safeguarding partnership.