

Introduction

The Children Act (1989) marked a fundamental shift in perceptions of children and their place and status in society. No longer could court cases go ahead and legal battles be waged over the heads of children without them having any idea what was happening. The implementation of the Act in October 1991 required that children's views should be heard, that their best interests should be the main consideration and that the child's welfare should be paramount in all dealings involving children.

After the Act there was a flurry of advice and guidance documents on how to implement it. Of these, 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (HMSO, 1999) is among the most important. There have also been various documents from the Department for Education and Skills and further Government guidance. The specific responsibilities laid upon Education are explored in this pack.

As this pack goes to print, important changes are in the air. The most significant of these might be heralded by the Green Paper, launched in September 2003 for consultation and debate until 2006, that will require more sharing of roles and responsibilities across agencies.

Child protection practice is used to accommodating change at a fast and furious pace as new research and new developments inform our thinking. Therefore, this pack does not seek to give a comprehensive education in all aspects of child protection work. Its aim is to give a brief overview of the main issues involved and step-by-step advice on how teachers, managers and advisers in Education can fulfil their legal and moral responsibilities towards children.

The pack is presented in the following sections:

- 1 Recognising and responding to abuse** - Definitions of abuse, the legal concept of significant harm and thresholds for action.
- 2 The role of the designated teacher** - Keeping records, communicating with families and contributing to child protection plans.
- 3 The role of the school** - Procedures and responsibilities for teachers and all Education staff, including interagency responsibilities.
- 4 Dealing with allegations of abuse** - Against staff, against members of the community, and between children.
- 5 Creating a protective ethos** - Employment, supervision, the physical environment, staff conduct with children, using the Internet, the curriculum and training requirements.
- 6 Child abuse prevention** - Using anti-bullying work as a way in to the topic, building self-esteem and confidence, and networking.
- 7 Preparing for OFSTED** - Checklist for preparation and action and a model child protection policy.

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Starting a child protection file

When the first piece of information comes to light, the designated teacher should start a child protection file for that child. It should be separate from the child's school file and should contain only child protection information. At the front of the file there should be a cover sheet containing the following information:

- An indicator that the file is confidential.
- The name and address of the school (this seems obvious, but sometimes information is taken away by police from several sources and files can be mixed up).
- The child's full name, address and date of birth.
- 'Also known as' or 'previously known as' names where necessary, eg where families have reconstituted and the child's surname has changed.
- A list of other family members, with their names and how they are related to the child. Include people who are not blood relatives but are living in the home, eg step-parents, Mum's boyfriend, etc and include the ages of any family members who are under 18, if known.
- The date this file was started.
- If the child has been referred to Social Services, record the name and telephone number of the key social worker.
- The name and telephone number of the child's GP.
- If other child protection files are held in school about this child or someone closely connected to them, including details of these too.
- If someone in school is working closely with the child, eg a school counsellor or special needs assistant, write that name as well.

On the cover of the child's regular school file, place a symbol – a red dot, for example – to indicate that a child protection file exists for this child. Make sure staff know what this symbol means, and whom to consult if they need to. The child protection file should be kept by the designated teacher, separately to the school file, in a locked filing cabinet.

Confidentiality, access and data protection

While parents have access to the child's school file, the child protection file does not come under the Data Protection Act requirement of parental access in state-maintained schools. It is up to the school – usually the headteacher and/or designated teacher – to decide who should read the file. In a small primary school there might be a case for several staff knowing about the concerns because they will all have close contact with the child, but in a large secondary it is unlikely the whole staff need to know. Each case should be considered individually. If staff are working with the child in such a way that knowledge of this particular information would change their working practice or help them in individual work with the child, they should be told. However, it is not generally considered necessary for all staff to know so that they can be on the lookout for signs of distress or abuse. This kind of alertness should be afforded to every child, not just those whose difficulties have already come to light.

Child protection contacts

The designated child protection teacher is:

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If that person is unavailable, contact:

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Important telephone numbers

- Child Protection Review Unit (Social Services)
- Local police (child protection)
- ChildLine 0800 1111
- NSPCC Helpline 0800 800500

Reporting an incident

If you have concerns about a possible risk of harm to a child, please:

- inform the designated teacher at the earliest opportunity
- complete a logging form (these are available from the school office).

In a protective school, teachers regularly share opinions about each other's work and this is considered supportive rather than some kind of critical scrutiny. Staff look out for each other by warning a colleague that an action they have seen might leave the colleague open to misunderstanding and false allegation. There are also clear routes through to the right people on the rare occasion that a member of staff witnesses or hears something that makes them suspect a colleague may be acting in an abusive way.

When dealing with children, a protective environment allows for professional judgement but also gives guidance on appropriate and inappropriate contact. Staff know they could be asked to justify their behaviour with a child, and also know to whom they should turn for support when they are having difficulties with a child.

The school curriculum

From their early years, children can be taught the skills they need to help keep them safe from abusers. It is not a topic that needs to be tackled directly. The skills needed to keep safe from abuse are the same skills that will help children stay clear of bullies or peer pressure to behave badly or take unacceptable risks. Since bullying is a common experience, either direct or indirect, for children in school, it is a good topic to use as a vehicle to stay safe from abusers. Children who are confident, assertive, know how to assess a risk and, most importantly, have good networks of support from trusted adults, are children who are less likely to be bullied or abused and, if they are, far more likely to tell after the first time.

Good-quality sex education gives a child considerable protection from the ignorance that allows abusers to exploit them. If teachers work alongside parents to give children a network of people who will answer questions openly and honestly without being easily shocked, children will feel able to talk over their concerns and experiences and get advice.

There are good-quality personal safety materials on the market that can help even young children understand and assess the safety of various situations when they are out playing, and which encourage children to work out strategies for staying safe. See the resources list on page 58 for more details of recommended materials.

Use of the Internet

The Internet has transformed our experience of the world. Education has greatly benefited from the wealth of information available. Unfortunately, the Internet has brought with it another avenue of opportunity for paedophiles, who use it to lure children into relationships that the children cannot comprehend to be dangerous until it is too late. Innocent images of children can be scanned and reformed into pornographic images, and information gleaned from school Web sites, etc has in the past been used as a tool to target children in local communities. Schools have a clear responsibility to ensure that their ICT systems minimise the risks to children as far as possible. There are very good blocks and policing systems that most schools now have in place, but there is still a need for careful monitoring of what children are getting into when they switch on a school computer. The most risky situations will happen at home, so work with parents to reinforce the messages being given.

Model child protection policy

[Name of school] is committed to promoting the health and welfare of all its pupils, and to following the national and local guidance for the protection of children. This policy applies to everyone who works in school, whether they are employed or volunteers.

The school will follow the procedures set out by the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) for [Area] and by [LEA]. In particular, the school will:

- appoint a designated teacher for child protection from the senior management team, who will be trained and supported in the task of overseeing all child protection matters within the school
- ensure that a named governor for child protection is also appointed
- make every member of school staff aware of their individual responsibility for the protection of children in their care; ensure that everyone knows the name and role of the designated teacher and governor
- arrange basic training for all staff in child abuse awareness, that will include what to do if they are worried about a child and how to respond to a child who tells them about abuse
- set up a good, accurate record-keeping system to monitor all children about whom concerns have been expressed, whether or not these concerns lead to a child protection referral
- ensure that all staff, and all volunteers who have substantial contact with children, have undergone Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks at the appropriate level
- develop effective links with other agencies, such as Social Services, police and health and contribute to interagency enquiries, child protection conferences and other related groups as appropriate
- make parents aware of the school's responsibilities in child protection
- fulfil any special responsibilities or tasks required in the care of children on the child protection register.

Promoting a protective ethos

The curriculum, staff training and daily practice of [name of school] seek to create a protective ethos where risk to the personal safety of children, particularly the risk of abuse, is minimised. The school will also encourage working practices that will protect staff from misunderstanding or malicious accusations.

If school staff become concerned about a possible risk to the health and welfare of a pupil, the school will work as much as possible in partnership with parents. However, current child protection procedures will be followed, and where appropriate, the school will have to share its concern with Social Services or other agencies. Occasionally, a mistake may be made, but in the best interests of all children we believe it is better to risk being overcautious. We hope parents share this philosophy and accept that [name of school] will not act maliciously or thoughtlessly in this regard.

This school recognises the importance of high self-esteem and self-confidence in keeping children safe. The school curriculum includes activities designed to promote the well-being of the children and give them personal safety information that is appropriate to their ages and levels of development. The increased vulnerability of special needs children, and those who have