



Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026: Summary of Key Changes



Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026

A guide to multi-agency working
to help, protect and promote the welfare
of children

March 2026

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Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026

Statutory Guidance Overview

Working Together to Safeguard Children is the statutory guidance that sets out how organisations and professionals must work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. A child is defined as anyone under the age of 18. All safeguarding duties, assessments, and child protection processes under this guidance are therefore child-focused and apply fully up to the child's 18th birthday.

The 2026 update explicitly clarifies that safeguarding responsibilities extend beyond 18 in specific circumstances, including:

- Care leavers up to age 25
 - Young people receiving ongoing support through Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans.
- This means practitioners must continue to consider help, support, and protection needs for care leavers within a Working Together framework, even where the young person is legally an adult.

Multi-Agency Cooperation

Effective safeguarding depends on coordinated work across local authorities, health, police, education, and community sectors.

Focus on Early Help and Prevention

The guidance emphasises early intervention, family-centred practice, and prevention to improve child outcomes.

Accountability and Professional Challenge

Strengthened expectations on accountability and professional challenge ensure higher safeguarding standards.



Why the Guidance Was Updated



Aligning with Social Care Reforms

The update aligns safeguarding practice with ongoing children's social care reforms and emerging evidence on effective support.

Strengthening Multi-Agency Accountability

The guidance improves multi-agency accountability, leadership, and joined-up working to reduce fragmentation in safeguarding systems.

Addressing Complex Harms Holistically

It emphasises responding to overlapping harms like domestic abuse and exploitation through holistic safeguarding approaches.

Promoting Anti-Racist Practices

The update explicitly promotes anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practices to address inequalities in safeguarding outcomes.

Who the Guidance Applies To



Comprehensive Safeguarding Scope

Safeguarding applies to all children, including those in birth families, foster care, and adoptive placements, ensuring no exceptions.

Inclusion of Unborn Children

Guidance emphasises early intervention by supporting unborn children when concerns arise during pregnancy.

Multi-Agency Responsibility

All organisations involved with children, including education, health, police, social care, and voluntary sectors, share safeguarding duties.

Unified Safeguarding Principle

The guidance reinforces that safeguarding is everyone's duty, promoting consistent protection across all children's circumstances.

Stronger Focus on Anti-Racist and Anti-Discriminatory Practice



Leadership Responsibility

Leaders must foster inclusive cultures that actively challenge racism and discrimination within organisations.

Practitioner Awareness

Practitioners need to recognise and address how bias affects family engagement and decision-making in safeguarding.

Embedded Anti-Racist Practice

Anti-racist approaches are integrated across early help, family support, and child protection processes.

Using Data to Address Inequalities

Safeguarding partners use data to identify disproportionality and act on discrimination patterns affecting children.

Expanded Understanding of Harm

Nuanced Types of Harm

2026 guidance highlights hidden, cumulative, and overlapping harms that children may face.

Strengthened Abuse Guidance

Emphasis on domestic, sexual, teenage relationship, honour-based, and faith-related abuse and their impacts.

Online and Digital Harms

Recognition of online harms linked to real-life exploitation requiring integrated safeguarding approaches.

Holistic Safeguarding Approach

Guidance stresses considering full context of child's life for effective protection planning and risk identification.



The Family Help Model



Integration of Support Services

Family Help combines early help and child in need support into one cohesive service to reduce fragmentation and improve family experience.

Continuity and Consistency

Families receive support from a consistent practitioner or small team, ensuring continuous and flexible assistance as needs evolve.

Relational and Strengths-Based Approach

The model prioritises relational practice, partnership with families, and working with family networks for positive outcomes.

Seamless System and Improved Outcomes

Designed to improve engagement, reduce escalation to statutory intervention, and ensure timely support for children.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements



Clear Accountability and Leadership

The guidance clarifies roles of safeguarding partners with strong accountability and leadership in safeguarding children.

Effective Multi-Agency Collaboration

Safeguarding partners work strategically and operationally together with clear expectations and scrutiny mechanisms.

Information Sharing and Risk Identification

Emphasis on effective information sharing to identify risks and protect children within safeguarding systems.

Data-Driven Transparency and Impact

Annual reports focus on evidencing impact and analysing data to address safeguarding challenges and inequalities.

Stronger Child Protection Expectations



Comprehensive Safeguarding Responsibilities

2026 guidance emphasises safeguarding duties applying to all children with stronger child protection practice expectations.

Multi-Agency Assessments

The guidance highlights the need for robust, timely, and collaborative assessments when children are at risk of significant harm.

Child-Centered Approach

Direct work with children is reinforced to ensure their voices, experiences, and wishes are central to all safeguarding plans.

Stronger Strategy Discussions

Expectations for strategy discussions, especially in child sexual abuse cases, are clarified to improve protection planning.

Learning from Serious Safeguarding Incidents

Clearer Notification Guidance

Working Together 2026 provides clearer guidance on when and how safeguarding incidents should be notified and reviewed.

Learning Culture Focus

The guidance emphasises a learning culture that prioritizes improvement over blame in safeguarding practices.

Meaningful Practice Changes

Learning from reviews leads to meaningful changes in safeguarding practices for better child protection.

Streamlined Processes

Processes are clarified and streamlined to improve the quality and sharing of learning from serious incidents.



Learning Knows No Bounds

What This Means in Practice



Child-Centred Collaborative Working

Professionals and organisations must work in joined-up, reflective, and child-centred ways to support children effectively.

Early Identification and Family Partnership

Early identification of needs and stronger partnerships with families are essential for consistent support via the Family Help model.

Leadership and Inclusive Culture

Leaders provide clear direction, foster inclusive cultures, and ensure systems enable effective multi-agency working.

Improved Oversight and Accountability

Enhanced information sharing and data analysis improve safeguarding oversight and demonstrate impact on children's outcomes.