



Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**
Social Care **Wales**

An introduction to safeguarding children living in residential care

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Find out more about safeguarding the children you're caring for

What does safeguarding children mean?

Safeguarding children is about recognising the possible dangers they may face and protecting them from abuse and neglect. It's also about helping them to recognise the dangers around them.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility at any time. However, as a professional in social care you have a duty to do everything you can to ensure children are protected from abuse and are safe. You also have a duty to report any safeguarding issues (about children or adults).

Your organisation's safeguarding policy

Your organisation is required to have a safeguarding policy to address any concerns you have about a child's welfare. It's important that you understand the safeguarding policy and this should be an important part of your induction and ongoing training to ensure you understand the process of safeguarding and to how to report any concerns you have.

For example, a young person may say they will tell you something if you promise not to tell. You can never agree to this, and the children that you look after need to know and understand this.

If you don't report a concern you have about a child, this can lead to:

- a child being caused harm or in being danger of abuse that you could possibly have prevented
- disciplinary action from your employer
- a fitness to practice investigation by Social Care Wales for breaking the Code of Professional Practice.

All the people (children and adults) you work with should understand this limit to confidentiality. You should discuss this with your senior on duty, the child's social worker or the police depending on the nature of your concern. You should never ignore it.

Children's experiences before being looked after

Before the children you look after came into care, they will have usually experienced some form of [trauma or abuse](#).

When working with children, abuse is commonly broken up into four types (under definitions of [The Children Act 1989](#))

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is deliberately hurting a child causing injuries such as bruises, broken bones, burns or cuts. It isn't accidental - children who are physically abused are subjected to violence such as being hit, kicked, poisoned, burned, slapped or having objects thrown at them.

Sometimes parents or carers will deliberately cause illness in a child or lie about its symptoms. This is called fabricated or induced illness by proxy (previously known as 'Munchausen's by proxy'). You should be aware of this as something to consider if a young person is ill after coming home from a family visit.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a type of physical abuse where girls have their genitals cut. This abuse can lead to girls and women having gynecological problems as they develop. You may see the following signs of FGM in children and young people that you care for:

- difficulties urinating or incontinence
- frequent or chronic vaginal, pelvic or urinary infections
- menstrual problems
- kidney damage and possible failure
- cysts and abscesses
- pain when having sex
- infertility
- complications during pregnancy and childbirth
- emotional and mental health problems.

[Female genital mutilation: signs, indicators and effects](#)

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the ongoing emotional maltreatment of a child. It's sometimes called psychological abuse and can seriously damage a child's emotional health and development. [Children who are emotionally abused are often suffering another type of abuse.](#)

Emotional abuse includes deliberate behaviour to a child, such as:

- scaring them
- humiliating them
- isolating them
- ignoring them
- witnessing domestic abuse.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is when a child is forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities. This doesn't have to be physical contact and it can happen online. Sometimes the child won't understand that what's happening to them is abuse or even understand that it's wrong. They may be afraid to speak out. [The NSPCC estimates that 1 in 20 children in the UK have been a victim of sexual abuse.](#)

Contact abuse involves touching, where an abuser makes physical contact with a child, including penetration. This includes:

- sexual touching of any part of the body, whether the child is wearing clothes or not
- rape or penetration by putting an object or body part inside a child's mouth, vagina or anus
- forcing or encouraging a child to take part in sexual activity
- making a child take their clothes off, touch someone else's genitals or masturbate.

Non-contact abuse involves non-touching, such as grooming, exploitation, persuading children to perform sexual acts over the internet and flashing. It includes:

- encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts
- not taking proper measures to prevent a child being exposed to sexual activities by others
- meeting a child following sexual grooming with the intent of abusing them
- online abuse including making, viewing or distributing child abuse images
- allowing someone else to make, view or distribute child abuse images
- showing pornography to a child
- sexually exploiting a child for money, power or status ([child sexual exploitation](#)).

Neglect

Neglect: when a caregiver does not meet the child's basic needs. Neglect can mean:

- physical neglect: Failing to provide for a child's basic needs such as food, clothing or shelter. Failing to adequately supervise a child or provide for their safety
- educational neglect: Failing to ensure a child receives an education
- emotional neglect: Failing to meet a child's needs for nurture and stimulation, perhaps by ignoring, humiliating, intimidating or isolating them. This is often the most difficult form of neglect to prove
- medical neglect: Failing to provide appropriate health care, including dental care and refusal of care or ignoring medical recommendations.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

If the children you're working with have experienced abuse, and their abuser has been found guilty of a crime, they may be entitled to [Criminal Injuries Compensation](#). If you think that one of the children you look after may be eligible, speak to your manager or the child's social worker.

Children's experiences when living in children's homes

In addition to the abuse discussed above, children can sometimes experience other types of abuse you should be aware of, including:

Domestic Abuse

Teenagers can be at risk of domestic abuse, particularly where they have witnessed it as children and do not recognise healthy relationships.

[Violence in young people's relationships – Reflections on two serious case reviews](#)

People of any gender and sexuality can be victims of domestic abuse. The young people you work with may not realise that they're being abused and may confuse some of the signs of abuse with love. For example, a young person may experience:

- control
- coercion
- be isolated from their friends and family
- not able to wear make-up
- be forced to wear certain clothes.

But they may think these behaviours mean their boyfriend or girlfriend is showing them love.

This may also be the case if they're being stalked or being stopped from going out alone: the intensity of the relationship may feel nice for a while.

If they're experiencing physical abuse, they may have bruises that they can't explain. They may not realise that violence in relationships is wrong, for example saying, "it was just a slap." Teenagers in abusive relationships face the same risks as adults, so you need to manage these risks carefully.

SafeLives has produced a useful resource [Working with young people who experiencing relationship abuse](#)

[STIRitAPP](#) is a web-based tool about abusive relationships which has been developed by young people themselves.

You may also encounter honour-based violence: a form of domestic abuse where people are at risk of harm, as they are seen to have damaged their family's 'honour' by behaving in ways that don't fit with the family's culture or beliefs. It may be that a young person has been in a relationship with someone their family doesn't approve of, or they've behaved in a way the family considers inappropriate. To keep the family's 'honour', that person may then be subject to abuse or harm.

The Welsh Government's website Live Fear Free has [advice about honour based violence and forced marriage](#)

Child sexual exploitation (CSE)/Criminal exploitation

We have a page covering [Child Sexual Exploitation/Criminal exploitation](#)

Trafficking

Children can be trafficked in many different ways. Some children may have been brought into the UK specifically to be exploited. However, children can be trafficked from one town or street to the next, or across county borders as well, and this type of trafficking is often linked to other types of abuse, usually [CSE or criminal exploitation](#).

Signs to look out for in children include:

- going missing for days, and not saying where they are going or have been
- not answering their phone when they are missing
- asking to be picked up from places where they have no connection (for example, if their family and friends are in one place in the county or town but they are asking to be picked up from the other side of the county or town)
- wearing inappropriate clothing or no shoes when they're collected. This may mean they've escaped from somewhere
- unusual behaviour or substance misuse
- becoming withdrawn
- losing weight
- neglecting their personal hygiene or appearance.

There is a difference in the way that children who run away are reported to the Police:

‘Missing’ – means that nobody knows where the child or young person is and they are thought to be at risk. This can involve children being gone overnight.

‘Absent without authority’ – means that you know where they are and they won’t come home. This can involve children staying out past curfew.

When you report their absence to the police it is helpful to be clear about the difference, and follow the child’s care plan and what that says about how to deal with this.

Online/cyber abuse

Some children are abused online. This may take the form of non-contact sexual abuse as discussed above but may also be online bullying or grooming with the aim of involving children in some of the other types of abuse discussed here ([CSE](#), radicalisation and others).

Signs to look out for include children:

- becoming withdrawn
- being reluctant to go to school
- not wanting to go out
- avoiding familiar places and people
- self-harm or suicide attempts
- meeting people they are not normally with
- unusual use of substances
- having more than one or different phones
- being secretive about their online activities.

The NSPCC has a useful resource called [Online abuse – what is online abuse](#)

Radicalisation

Some children are targeted by groups that hold extreme views. In the same way that the children you look after are vulnerable to being groomed for [CSE](#) or criminal exploitation, they may also seek a feeling of 'belonging' and these groups will take advantage of this.

Radicalisation may be extreme religious views, far right views (for instance, racism) or far left (for instance, promoting violent social unrest) and is not restricted to particular religions or ethnicities. If you suspect anyone is being radicalised for the purpose of terrorism [you have to report it](#).

Signs to look out for are similar to the online/cyber abuse above but also include:

- spending increasing time online and not telling you what they are doing
- change in behaviour and/or appearance
- expressing racist or extreme views.

Financial abuse

Financial abuse can take many forms, and again may cross over into the types of abuse described above. This can include the child's benefits or allowances that the home is being paid not being used properly, or wages or pocket money being taken from them. Children can also be used to falsely claim benefits or be forced to beg or commit crime for money. As example of this is where children are being forced to steal to order from shops to make money.

Signs to look out for include:

- a child not having basic essentials such as sanitary products and appropriate clothing, or being asked to pay for them out of their own money
- children not having the right amount of money that you know they should have (for instance pocket money)
- children stealing items that don't seem to be for them.

[Read more about financial abuse](#)

What should you do if you think there's a safeguarding issue?

If you have any concerns about the children you look after experiencing abuse, you must speak to someone. If somebody tells you about abuse, you cannot keep it a secret. Remember that a child may experience a range of abuse and will not always fit into the neat categories above.

Keep your eyes and ears open for any signs or changes in their behaviour and always discuss any worries you have with your manager, the child's social worker or police, according to your organisation's safeguarding policy. Some incidents are 'notifiable incidents' and you must report them to Care Inspectorate Wales. There is more information about this duty in [Part 15 of the Regulated Services \(Service Providers and Responsible Individuals\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2017](#).

Organisational or institutional abuse

Sadly, there are occasions where the children who are looked after, are not kept safe in their children's homes. This is where children are not cared for properly and poor or unsafe practice is systematic in the home and/or organisation.

This may happen because staff don't understand the responsibilities of how to provide care or it may be that workers set out deliberately to cause harm to children. It may be one worker, or a group of workers, and a culture of poor care and/or abuse can develop in homes. For example, you may see 'restraint' being used incorrectly or too often to exercise power over children.

There are many known [occasions where children have been systematically abused by a number of individuals in children's homes](#). This is always about the misuse of power and it can be very hard to speak out if you see or hear anything worrying, particularly if you feel you're the only person with concerns. If you can, speak to your manager or a senior colleague or someone you're not worried about. No matter how hard it is to speak up, you must not do nothing. Your organisation has a 'whistle blowing' policy and as you're registered with Social Care Wales, you have a responsibility to report any concerns you have.

Useful resources

[Our work to support children who are looked after](#)

[Our chosen or 'curated' research about the number who are looked after](#)

[There are a number of videos about staying safe online on Childline's YouTube channel, including sending nudes, online bullying and grooming](#)

[Advice about keeping safe online](#)

[Advice about sex, relationships and the internet](#)

[The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command](#)

We want your feedback

Help us to improve the Residential child care worker resource by telling us what you think about it in our short [four question survey](#).