

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE

A YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO
THE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN REVIEW 2005



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WHAT IS THIS GUIDE ABOUT?

This guide is about a review looking into how safe children are. It was carried out by inspectors¹ to check that staff are keeping to the rules and doing all they can to keep children safe. They put what they found into a report called; "Safeguarding Children".

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is written for young people. It should help explain what is being done to keep them safe. Young people will be able to see what the review thinks is being done well and what it says is not good enough at the moment.

WHY IS THIS REVIEW NECESSARY?

Keeping children safe has become far more important in recent years. Whilst most children are safe, there has been concern in the past that some children are not always as safe as they should be. Many reports have said that some things have simply got to change.

The Government has asked all organisations that inspect services for children² to come together to report every three years on what they called **children's safeguards**. This simply means *"the steps taken to keep children safe from harm; such as illness, abuse or injury"*.

¹ who visit schools, hospitals, children's homes, foster care, social services, the police, crown prosecution service, youth offending teams, probation, court services and prisons

² Commission for Social Care Inspection; Office of Standards in Education; Healthcare Commission; HM Inspectorate of Constabulary; HM Inspectorate of Probation; HM Inspectorate of Court Administration; HM Inspectorate of Prisons; and, HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate

WHAT ARE THE 'BIG MESSAGES'?

- ❑ Keeping children safe has become more important for many services working with them.
- ❑ More effort is being put into finding out what children themselves think. When asked, most are saying that they feel safe, and many more children know how to complain or seek help if they need it.
- ❑ Not all services are good at listening to children. Services working with children do not always know how best to communicate with children who find it hard to talk. Often, children involved in court are not listened to.
- ❑ Children who don't see their family often have no one else to visit them (like a social worker, independent visitor or friend).
- ❑ Some services working with children do not know what abuse is and are not always clear what concerns they should tell social services about. Also, social services do not always have enough staff to deal with all the concerns it gets. Because of this, some services have stopped passing on some concerns to social services.
- ❑ The review says that a number of services are poor at sharing information or working with others to help keep children safe.
- ❑ The review is concerned about the welfare of special groups of children³. It thinks that some of these will be less safe.
- ❑ Some agencies are very poor at knowing whether the children they work with are safe from harm. Also, because of staff shortages, they sometimes allow people to work with children without checking whether this is safe.

³ children being 'looked after' in council care, children with disabilities, children in prison settings, young people with a mental illness (including those in secure units), children waiting to be adopted, children applying to live in this country (known as "asylum-seekers") and children living away from home in places that don't get inspected.

- The review thinks that there is too much use of force to control children. It is also concerned about the amount of searching of children or keeping them in their rooms for long parts of the day, in some settings.
- The review has asked for better planning and services to help keep children seeking asylum safe. It is very concerned about the welfare of children held in immigration removal centres.

OTHER THINGS THE REVIEW SAID

The review says what inspectors found out about how well those working with children are doing to keep them safe. The review itself covers four main areas:

- Children who are living at home;
- Children who are living away from home;
- Children who are involved in court; and
- Children who are seeking asylum.

It also looked at the safety of:

- i) children with disabilities (in schools and colleges);
- ii) children who spend a long time in hospital;
- iii) children looked after a long way from their home area; and,
- iv) children who are locked up, by the courts.

The review includes much of what children themselves have been saying to both inspectors and the Children's Rights Director⁴.

This guide explains what the review says is working well for children and where it says things need to improve.

⁴ NOTE: There are details about the Children's Rights Director's reports at the back of this guide, if you want to see what other children have been saying.

WHAT IS WORKING WELL FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE LIVING AT HOME?

- √ The review says that keeping children safe is being taken more seriously than ever before by local councils, health services and the justice system. However, other agencies differ in the amount of importance that they give to keeping children safe.
- √ Some agencies are working better with each other to deal with concerns about children.
- √ Children are more listened to. Here are some examples of what children have been saying;

"Treat us as individuals rather than children as a whole".

"Listen to children like they matter and so you believe it".

"Talk to us, not through our parents".

"It's helpful having a social worker who listens to my views ... knowing I will be listened to ... the social worker listening and helping me talk with my daddy".

"There is always someone to talk to - it may be a favourite teacher but the learning mentors are always there for you".

Children with disabilities also have a right to be heard. Here are two comments from children with hearing impairment.

"This year when the school council makes decisions it is acted upon. We have a good say in what goes on."

"I know who to talk to if I have a problem".

WHAT THINGS NEED TO IMPROVE FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE LIVING AT HOME?

- × Social services usually act quickly when told that a child is being harmed. But, sometimes when other people think that a child isn't being cared for well enough, social services don't always agree. The review felt that some could be slow to find out for themselves whether the child is in need of help.
- × Those who employ people to work with children must always check their backgrounds. They must make sure that they have never harmed children before, and that they are 'fit' (that is according to police checks, job references, qualifications and experience). Children are more at risk when people are allowed to work with them without proper checks.

The review RECOMMENDS that people working with children are properly checked.

- × Those listening to children must also learn to do something with what they've been told. Otherwise what's the point?
- × Children with disabilities, young people with mental health problems and children placed for adoption are in need of better care and protection. Here is what one child with disabilities told us;

"I did not understand the words they were using ... nobody explained anything to me about going home ... People told me different information and confused me".

- × Many services do not know how to keep children with disabilities safe and this may well be because it is not given enough importance. Services working with children do not always know how best to communicate with children who find it hard to talk. Because of this many of these children are not being listened to. The review is very concerned about that. It means that some children with disabilities might not be as safe as they should be.

The review **RECOMMENDS** that all staff working with children with disabilities should know how to: i) communicate with them; ii) spot when they might be being harmed; iii) understand their behaviour; and, iv) know what to do to keep them safe.

WHAT IS WORKING WELL FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE LIVING AWAY FROM HOME?

- √ Risks to children who live away from home (in schools, children's homes, foster care homes etc.) are better understood than before.
- √ The review was pleased to see that many councils are trying to find more places for children to live that are nearer to home.
- √ More is being done to make sure children who are living away from home are safer. For example, the review says that more is being done to tackle bullying, to get families more involved and to give children ways of speaking out.
- √ Children living in residential homes, schools and long-term in hospital have mainly told inspectors that they feel safe and well supported by staff. Children locked in secure children's homes and secure training centres report feeling safe, well looked after and treated fairly.
- √ Many children are happy with the level of professional visits and support they get. Here is what two of them had to say;

"It's helpful having a social worker who does all she can and I have a lovely foster carer ... knowing I will be listened to".

"I have been helped to live with my grandparents and can keep in touch with my friends".

- √ There are now people (called "advocates") whose job it is to help children sort out things that they are not happy about.

- √ Many people working with children who are living away from home now have to follow “standards”⁵ of care. They tell staff what they must do in order to keep children safe. These standards are checked by inspectors, whose job it is to make sure that they are being followed.
- √ There are safer arrangements for children living away from home, for a short time, in some places where these standards do not apply. All sorts of sports, arts, church and volunteer activities are now covered by actions to keep children safe from harm.

The review RECOMMENDS that the Department for Education and Skills look into arrangements for all children living away from home to make sure that they do help keep children safe.

- √ Some hospitals already have someone who children can approach, and who will help to make sure their care is well organised between all the different doctors and nurses they need to see.

The review RECOMMENDS that hospitals have a named person who children are able to talk to, and who are responsible for keeping children safe.

WHAT THINGS NEED TO IMPROVE FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE LIVING AWAY FROM HOME?

- × The review says that having someone to visit is an important part of keeping children safe. Some children are clearly unhappy with their level of support. Here is what some of them have said:

"I wasn't questioned on how I felt whilst living at the foster home".

"It's unhelpful not knowing my social worker has left and then not having one ... not having anyone from social services to talk to except a duty social worker who doesn't know me ... having too many changes of

⁵ NOTE: There is further information about Young Person's Guides to these standards at the back of this guide.

social workers ... when meetings are cancelled ... not knowing who my social worker is".

The review RECOMMENDS the law be changed to say that social workers must regularly visit children who are "looked after".

"Since I moved to my current placement, I found it difficult as I have been moved away from my friends and family to a place where I didn't know anyone".

- × Some children are still finding it difficult to get adults to listen to them. The review says that complaints procedures need to be much more child-friendly and better at getting things sorted out. It also shows that councils vary greatly in involving children, and their families (for example in making a care plan).
- × The review says that councils are placing a lot of children far from home. Also, they do not always do enough checking to make sure that placements (schools, children's homes, foster care etc.) care for children well or keep them safe. They need to stop placing children in the care of children's homes that don't get inspected because they cannot be sure that they will keep children safe.
- × Social services are not always making sure that children 'looked after', who are at risk, are protected in the same way as other children would be. The review says that it is wrong for them to think that they must be safe simply because they are "already in care".
- × The review has serious concerns about how some staff rely too much on the use of force to control children. They often ignore better ways of managing behaviour. Also, children can get hurt when being restrained. Some staff do not know what they are doing, and others are not in control themselves. The review says that the Government should make it clear what staff are allowed to do. It also says that managers need to train and check their staff to make sure that they are carrying out restraints safely, and only when necessary. The review noted that the Youth Justice Board has joined up with others to look into this.

The review RECOMMENDS that the Government says what it expects of staff using physical restraint on children.

- × About one third of all young people admitted to a young offenders institution say that they have felt unsafe at some time. There are concerns about levels of bullying and self-harm.
- × There have been growing concerns about the welfare of young people in the armed forces following four tragic deaths at the Deepcut Barracks in Surrey. The review noted other reports saying that still not enough was being done. It has called for more “welfare” inspections to take place, looking at what it is like for young people under 18.

The review RECOMMENDS that the Government should think about “welfare” inspections for young people under 18 in the armed services.

- × There are problems with checking agency staff and some foster carers who move from service to service. The review wants these matters sorting out.
- × Staff and carers who need training in how to keep children safe are not always getting this. The review sees this as something needing attention.
- × Councils are often quite poor at making plans for the care of children placed a long way from home. It was found that sometimes people aren't listening to what children themselves have to say. The review also said that visits from some social workers to see children were few or cancelled or, sometimes, did not happen at all. Also, when children go to live with family or friends there aren't always checks that these are safe enough places for them to live.
- × Many children in prison settings are not kept safe from harm. Putting children alongside adults in prison settings (as can happen in young offender institutions) can be a pretty risky thing to do. This can be

worse in settings known to have problems with bullying, drugs and self-harm. Also prisoners' behaviour is sometimes controlled by force, being left in their rooms for large parts of the day and physically searched. The review says that these practices do not create good conditions for children, who are often more in need of care and protection. Staffing levels are better in local authority secure children's homes than in young offender institutions, which helps in keeping children safe. For its part, the Youth Justice Board has done much to improve life for children in all types of secure settings.

The review RECOMMENDS a named person in each young offenders institution to promote good practice in keeping children safe.

- × Security at some hospitals is seen as poor. Wards are open to anyone wishing to wander around. Other hospitals have much better security in place.
- × There was some concern about who children were able to talk to when in hospital. Here is what one young person had to say:

"Usually I have like a senior house officer, they kind of go to different hospitals to build their experience. So I usually see one of them which is annoying because it changes every time I come ..."

- × Hospitals don't always tell social services about children who stay more than three months, as they are supposed to.

WHAT IS WORKING WELL FOR CHILDREN INVOLVED IN COURT?

- √ More attention is being given to keeping children safe by those working in the justice system.
- √ Cases where children are witnesses to domestic violence or victims of abuse are better handled. More support has been put in place for witnesses. There is now more help available for children with problems attending court due to transport, translation, disabled access or fears of intimidation. More children are now able to give evidence by video

recording or television link, and there are more opportunities for children to meet court staff before the trial. This can be important based on what one young person said about their experience:

"The defence wasn't nice. He was horrible. He said I was a liar. No one warned me beforehand that he'd say that ... There were things I wanted to say but didn't get the chance to say".

√ The youth justice system, which deals with young people who commit offences, is seen as making many improvements. There are more ways of dealing with young offenders, apart from locking them up. Youth offending teams (YOTs), who work with young people to try to get them away from crime, take their responsibilities for keeping children safe seriously. YOTs reports are often asking courts to look at the issue of keeping children safe.

√ Most young people spoke highly about the YOT staff who work with them. Young people felt listened to, understood and treated fairly.

"I get to talk to someone who treats me like an adult and with respect ... They are interesting and I learn a lot about myself and how to stay out of trouble ... I learn about offending behaviour and finding out it gets you nowhere".

WHAT NEEDS TO IMPROVE FOR CHILDREN INVOLVED IN COURT?

- × There is still confusion within the justice system about what "safeguarding" means for it, and this makes the system less able to see what needs to happen to best keep children safe.
- × Most children have little or no say in decisions taken in family proceedings that will affect their lives (this is where courts are asked to decide what is best for children). Too often children are not encouraged to attend court and professional adults are left to speak for them. The review found that those adults are not always good at telling courts what children's views are. If children cannot attend court it is important that somebody says exactly what they would like

to happen. Courts that know what children's views are will make better decisions for those children. The review has said that children need to be heard in court, whenever they are capable of giving their views.

The review RECOMMENDS that the Courts Service and CAFCASS should work to give children more of a say in family court decisions (for example, about who you should live with or be able to stay in touch with).

- × The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), set up to achieve what is best for children in the court system, is sometimes failing. Delays in finding CAFCASS staff to deal with cases are not in children's interests.
- × The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decides whether criminal cases are brought to court. Many children are caught up in domestic violence or child abuse cases, but the CPS are not always supporting them as victims. The review has called for earlier action to protect and support children who are victims or witnesses.
- × Children need more support when questioned at police stations. They need to know what to expect and about services they can ask for - like seeing a lawyer. The review was worried that some children are inappropriately kept overnight in police cells. It also raised concerns about ensuring that children get home safely afterwards, especially late at night.
- × Complaints procedures are not always available, making it more difficult for services to know when children think that things are going wrong.

WHAT IS WORKING WELL FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE SEEKING ASYLUM?

- √ There is a strong commitment from local councils to keeping asylum-seeking children safe.

- √ Many councils are trying their best to provide care and support to children who arrive in the UK without parents or another adult ("unaccompanied"). This is quite difficult because of the law, disagreements about who should pay and a lack of information about what kind of education a child has had or about any illnesses.
- √ Many local education authorities are working very hard to meet the educational needs of asylum-seeking children (although some schools are being slow at providing places).

WHAT NEEDS TO IMPROVE FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE SEEKING ASYLUM?

- × The report focused on those children who have made an asylum application - either as part of a family group or as unaccompanied children. These are the ones we know about. The ones we don't know about are even more concerning. That includes children who don't make an application and could be living with strangers.
- × Although many asylum-seeking children have their welfare needs met as well as other children, it is sometimes more difficult to identify what these are. This means that some are not as safe from harm as they should be. Some unaccompanied children may not be getting the help they need. Also, a smaller number who haven't applied to live in this country could be on their own or living in unsafe places. These children are in need of special protection.
- × Councils find it difficult to meet the needs of children from so many different countries. Their lifestyle (language, diet, religion, clothing) may be very different from the foster carers available.
- × All professionals involved with asylum-seeking children need to work with each other better.
- × The welfare of children held in immigration removal centres is a matter of great concern (these are centres where people who have failed in their application to stay in the UK are kept until they have to

leave the country). Being detained has risks of harm for children. It prevents them having the good education that they are entitled to. It restricts their play and activities. And, it causes some children distress and emotional problems.

The review RECOMMENDS that the Government should explain what the Immigration and Removal Centres and local councils need to do in order to keep children living in these centres safe.

OTHER INFORMATION

Useful contacts

Office of the Children's Rights Director, Commission for Social Care Inspection, St Nicholas Building, St Nicholas Street, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 1NB Tel: 0800 528 0731

Children's Rights Officers and Advocates, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF Tel: 0207 833 2100

NSPCC, Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH
Tel: 0207 825 2500

ChildLine, Freepost 1111, London N1 0BR
Tel: 0800 1111

National Voice, Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1 1JT
Tel: 0161 237 5577

National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE
Tel: 0207 843 6000

Websites

www.safeguardingchildren.org.uk

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

www.rights4me.org.uk

www.ncb-books.org.uk

www.cjsonline.gov.uk

Publications

"Every Child Matters" - what do you think? (DfES, September 2003)

Young Person's Guide to the Children's Homes Standards (DfES & National Children's Bureau)

Young Person's Guide to the Residential Special Schools Standards (DfES & National Children's Bureau)

"Safe from Harm" - Children's Views Report
(Children's Rights Director, July 2004)

Children's Views on Restraint
(Children's Rights Director, December 2004)

"Getting the Best from Complaints" - the Children's View
(Children's Rights Director, February 2005)

Mike Lindsay, Advisor to the Children's Rights Director
(for the Joint Chief Inspector's Review of Children's Safeguards)