



# Unit 1

# What is Child Protection?

## Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Provide a detailed definition as to what child protection means
- ✓ Understand the importance of proactivity in child protection
- ✓ Take practical steps to ensure children are safeguarded from harm

## Unit 1

### What is Child Protection?

Child Protection is part of Safeguarding practice. Child Protection is the activity that is undertaken to protect children who are likely to suffer harm or already suffering significant harm. **Child Protection** is what is in place to protect children who have already experienced harm, abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, or have otherwise been harmed.

Safeguarding is to prevent harm; **Child Protection** is how we respond to harm.

#### Definition of Child Protection

The definition of child protection according to Save the Children is:

#### Measures and structures to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence affecting children

In short, child protection means **safeguarding children** from all forms of harm. This includes violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. The main objective of child protection is to promote, protect and fulfil the rights of children to live without fear of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence as expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights, humanitarian and refugee treaties

#### Who Needs Protecting?

Being protected is every child's right. As already touched upon, children are able to thrive when necessary protective factors are in place to support their development. Some children are more vulnerable than others however, and need special attention. A child's age and physical, mental, emotional and social development are all components that influence their vulnerability and increase or decrease the likelihood of abuse.

A child's vulnerability that can be affected by many factors, which vary from one child to the next. Examples of which include the presence of a disability, or if a child is without his/her primary caregivers. Children in foster care may be more at risk than the children born in and living with their biological family. Gender can also play a major role in defining vulnerability in different contexts.

Environmental stresses can to a degree contribute to the risk of child abuse including poverty and food scarcity, unemployment and many different types of personal and family stress. Factors that push or pull children to engage in behaviour that puts them at risk.

### **The Importance of Child Protection**

Every child has the right to a life safe from harm. Nevertheless, every year the lives and physical, mental and emotional well-being of millions of children around the world is threatened by maltreatment - various forms of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation.

Research from around the world shows that approximately 20 percent of women and 5 to 10 percent of men say that they were sexually abused as children. Other studies show that between a quarter and a half of all children report severe and frequent physical abuse.

In addition, estimates suggest that 215 million children are involved in child labor, which is a form of child exploitation; 115 million of whom are involved in hazardous work.

These are just some of the alarming figures that show the magnitude of child protection violations around the world. They are under-recognized and under-reported and constitute barriers to the fulfillment of children's human rights. They also undermine children's healthy development and survival.

These violations happen across each and every country, culture and social and economic group. However, children whose parents or caregivers are absent owing to illness, death or abandonment are more vulnerable to maltreatment, due to the loss of their first line of protection.

### **Understanding Child Protection**

Child protection (CP) is a broad term used for efforts to safeguard children from actions or situations that place their healthy development and well-being at risk.

Child Protection is defined by UNICEF as to "prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and abuse against children."

The dimensions of CP are measures and structures that prevent and respond to physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse,; commercial sexual exploitation; child trafficking; child labor; abuse in the home, school, and community; and harmful and abusive traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation and child marriage.

Children need protection for the reason that they are physically, mentally and emotionally immature and therefore cannot protect themselves. The younger a child is, the more care and protection he or she will need. For instance, during the first five years of life children are particularly vulnerable and their survival and well-being depend primarily on their parents or other adult caregivers.

As children grow, their physical, cognitive and socio-emotional capabilities evolve and mature, but they are still not able to fully protect themselves until they reach adulthood.

Effective child protection involves working with a wide range of formal and informal bodies: governments, multilateral agencies, donors, communities, caregivers and families. It also depends on close partnership with children and initiatives to strengthen children's capacity to protect themselves

A successful system of child protection strengthens the capacity of all these actors to protect children for the long term, addressing root causes of maltreatment such as chronic poverty, insecurity, power imbalances (gender inequality, for example) and harmful traditional attitudes and behaviors.

### Creating a Protective Environment for Children

According to UNICEF, a protective environment is one where all actors — from children and health workers to governments and the private sector — fulfill their responsibilities to ensure that children are protected from abuse and exploitation. A protective environment consists of eight key elements.

If any of these elements is absent, children become more vulnerable to abuse, violence, discrimination and violation of their rights. These elements are:

- 1. Attitudes, traditions, customs, behavior and practices:** Children are at risk in societies where norms or traditions facilitate abuse. For example, social norms that tolerate adults having sex with minors or violence against children facilitate abuse. Children affected by HIV are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in societies where their status leads to discrimination. Children are more likely to be protected in societies where all forms of maltreatment of children are taboo and where the rights of children are broadly respected by customs and tradition.
- 2. Governmental commitment to fulfilling protection rights:** This is an important element of a protective environment. Governments are expected to show commitment to creating, enforcing and implementing strong legal frameworks that comply with international legal standards, policies and programs.
- 3. Open discussion and engagement with CP issues:** Above all, children need to be free to speak openly about child protection concerns affecting them or others around them. Nationally, media attention and civil society engagement with child protection issues boost the strength of a protective environment. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) must make protection a priority. The silence must be broken.
- 4. Protective legislation and enforcement:** A robust legislative framework designed to protect children from abuse must be not adopted, implemented and enforced.
- 5. The capacity of people in routine contact with children to protect them:** Health workers, teachers, police, social workers and everyone else who interacts with children needs to

be equipped with the motivation, skills and authority to identify and respond to child instances of child abuse or mistreatment.

- 6. Children's life skills, knowledge and participation:** Children are less vulnerable to abuse when they are aware of their right not to be exploited and when they understand this is that exist to safeguard them. With this information, children can draw upon their knowledge, skills and resilience to reduce their risk of exploitation.



- 7. Monitoring and reporting of child protection issues:** An effective monitoring system records the incidence and nature of child protection abuses and allows for informed and strategic responses.
- 8. Services for recovery and reintegration:** Child victims of any form of neglect, exploitation or abuse are entitled to care and nondiscriminatory access to basic social services. All of which must be provided in an environment which prioritizes the health, self-respect and dignity of the young person in question.

Key to understanding the protective environment approach is acknowledging how child protection extends to all sectors, because even children who are stronger physically healthy can be victims of abuse. A well-nourished and immunized child who is physically abused is not a healthy child. A young girl who is sexually harassed in school or sexually abused at home is not likely to benefit from a positive educational experience. Children will never be free from exploitation until all levels of society — from the family to the international community — work together. When any layer of the protective environment is removed, a child becomes more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and violence.

### **Roles and Responsibilities in the Protection of Children**

All parts of society families, communities and governments play important roles in ensuring children's safety and well-being. Children have roles, too, appropriate to their ages, maturity levels and capacities. One of the most effective ways to safeguard children is to empower them to protect themselves through knowledge and skills for self-care. Children can also contribute to make child protection services stronger when they have meaningful opportunities to participate.

Families are the first line of defence for children. Families' primary social, moral and legal responsibility in society is to care for children and meet their basic needs.

Some families are overwhelmed by social and economic problems and struggle to protect their children. Communities are the second safety net for children. Informal networks of kin, friends and neighbors usually step into help children in need. Communities also provide more formal responses through groups such as churches and grassroots organizations. These groups can evaluate the needs of children and families, provide the necessary resources to support them and monitor and report any violations that may occur. The ability of communities to protect children is enhanced when stakeholders join forces; community child protection committees are an example.

Community oversight is especially important in countries where national child protection systems do not exist or are substandard. In these countries, communities play a major role in supporting children and families in need of protection. However, although community stakeholders usually have the will and commitment to help, sometimes they lack the resources and expertise necessary to meet the needs of all those at risk adequately.

The state assumes primary responsibility for securing children's right to protection. Governments should establish a robust child protection systems and make sure they work.

### **Child Protection System in the UK**

The four nations of the UK – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – have their own individual child protection system and laws to help protect children.

Each nation has a framework of legislation, guidance and practice to identify children who are at risk of abuse or mistreatment, take action to safeguard those children and prevent further abuse occurring.

Each UK nation takes responsibility for its own policies and laws around education, health and social welfare. This covers most aspects of safeguarding and child protection.

Laws are passed to prevent behaviour that can harm children or require action to protect children. Guidance sets out what organisations are expected to do to keep children safe.

Although the child protection systems are you need to each nation, they are all built around similar principles.

### **Child Protection System in England**

The Department for Education (DfE) takes responsibility for child protection in England. It sets out policy, legislation and statutory guidance on how the child protection framework should work.

Local safeguarding partners take responsibility for child protection policy, procedure and guidance at a local level. The local safeguarding arrangements are led by three statutory safeguarding partners:

- the local authority
- the clinical commissioning group
- the police.

Working together with other authorities, they must co-ordinate and ensure the effectiveness of work to protect and promote the welfare of children, including making arrangements to identify and support vulnerable children.

### **Child Protection System in Wales**

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 was enshrined into law in April 2016. It provides the legal framework for social service provision in Wales.

At a local level, regional safeguarding children boards seek to ensure the effectiveness of work to protect and promote the welfare of children. They are responsible for local child protection policy, procedure and guidance.

Each board includes any:

- local authority
- chief officer of police
- local health board
- NHS trust, and
- provider of probation services that falls within the safeguarding board area.

### **Child Protection System in Northern Ireland**

The Northern Ireland Executive (via the Department of Health) takes responsibility for child protection in Northern Ireland. The executive sets out policy, legislation and statutory guidance on how the child protection framework should work.

The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) co-ordinates and ensures the effectiveness of work to protect and promote the welfare of children.

The board includes representatives from health, social care, the police, the probation board, youth justice, education, district councils and the NSPCC. The SBNI is responsible for creating and implementing policies and procedures to improve the cohesiveness of the agencies working together.

### **Child Protection System in Scotland**

The Scottish Government is responsible for child protection in Scotland. It sets out policy, legislation and statutory guidance on how the child protection system should work.

Child Protection Committees (CPCs) are responsible for multi-agency child protection policy, procedure, guidance and practice.

Within each local authority, child protection committees work with local agencies including children's social work, health services and the police, to safeguard children.

## **Child Development**

As there are many different perceptions of what a child is, when was it first determined that a child is classified as a person under the age of 18 years?

The answer to the question lies partially in the fact that it is internationally recognized, such as in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC), that children need to be afforded additional protection until they have reached a level of physical, mental and emotional maturity to take on the duties and responsibilities of an adult.

This suggests that before a person reaches 18 years, they are still developing and have physical, psychological and social needs that must be met to enable healthy growth and development. While children's abilities and capacities increase over time as they grow, and reduce their vulnerability from infancy through adolescence, their need for attention and guidance from parents, teachers and community members at large remains at each stage.

Child development tends to proceed in stage-like patterns of growth. Many attempts have been made to define these stages, but they often differ significantly from one culture to the next. A child's development should not be thought of as an unfolding pre-determined pathway, but instead as a process which is shaped by particular cultural and environmental experiences. Making sure protective factors are in place to prevent risks to children is part of fostering a healthy environment for growth and development.

### **What are Positive and Negative Factors for Child Development?**

There is a direct relationship between the healthy development of children and the presence of:

- a) Risk factors (i.e. threats to physical or psychological wellbeing)
- b) Protective factors, many of which are typically present within the local community

Children (and adults) are seen as resilient when the protective factors that are available help to shield them from the worst effects of risk factors.

Healthy development may be slowed down or even stopped entirely by the presence of risk factors in a child's environment. These may affect the children themselves, their parents or both, but are likely to detrimentally affect the child's development in any case. Protective factors encourage and enable healthy development and may be directly protective of children or may act through the protection of their parents.

### **Factors That Promote Growth:**

- Good parental guidance and support
- Social network support, including extended family, community members, teachers, etc
- An educational climate that is emotionally positive, open and supportive
- Appropriate role models that encourage coping skills

### **Factors That Pose Risks to a Child's Healthy Growth and Development:**

- Experience of violence, abuse, separation, fear
- Loss of family and friends
- Poor diet and malnutrition
- Lack of educational opportunities
- Excessive burden at an early age

**Further Reading:**