



UNIT-13

Safeguarding Children

Learning Outcomes

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

- ✓ Understand who takes responsibility for safeguarding children
- ✓ Identify some of the potential warning signs of abuse or neglect
- ✓ Take appropriate action where a child is believed to be at risk

Unit 13

Safeguarding Children

The subject of child safeguarding is one that must be both taken seriously and prioritised by anyone who works with or comes into contact with children on a regular basis. Though the probability of a child experiencing severe abuse or mistreatment at home or anywhere else is relatively low, it is a risk that exists.

More worryingly, a recent study carried out by the NSPCC in the UK found that the risk of a child experiencing some kind of mistreatment at home, at school or in the community in general is in fact growing.

A few key findings from the NSPCC's report:

- Severe neglect or maltreatment is experienced by around one in five children
- Children who experience abuse on the part of parents or carers are three times more likely to witness family violence
- One in every three children who experience sexual abuse don't tell anyone about it until a much later stage
- There's a direct correlation between all types of neglect/abuse and a person's likelihood of developing severe psychological health problems
- Suicidal thoughts and self-harm risk are elevated in children who have experienced any sort of abuse or maltreatment

One of the biggest challenges facing those involved in safeguarding children today is the way in which changes in society are resulting in new and more complex forms of abuse, bullying and mistreatment posing a threat to children of all ages.

Social media in particular having been blamed for a new wave of 'virtual' bullying and mistreatment, which like all forms of physical mistreatment can have a catastrophic impact on the health and wellbeing of the child affected.

Some of the more common or 'conventional' types of abuse children may encounter at any age include the following:

- Physical abuse and induced illness
- Female genital mutilation
- Radicalisation and exploitation
- Modern slavery
- Child grooming

- Forced marriage
- Emotional abuse
- Child trafficking
- Sexual abuse
- Domestic abuse
- All forms of negligence

It is stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) that every child has the fundamental right to be protected from harm, live in a safe environment and have the best possible access to a high standard of health and wellbeing.

In order for this to happen, those who come into contact with children on a regular basis in any context must contribute to their safety and wellbeing.

Whose Responsibility is Safeguarding Children?

Safeguarding children is a collective responsibility, which encompasses each and every person who works with or comes into contact with children on a regular basis in any context.

This means that those who work with or care for children in particular must know how to spot the early warning signs of emotional, physical or sexual abuse, while also knowing what to do if a child is suspected to be a victim of abuse, maltreatment or neglect.

It is essential to ensure that all forms of abuse and mistreatment are identified and addressed at the earliest possible stage, both for the immediate and long-term benefit of the child in question.

What is Safeguarding?

The term 'safeguarding' refers to any action, activity or effort that takes place for the purpose of protecting vulnerable individuals from harm. In the case of both adults and children alike, the primary objective of safeguarding is to protect the individual in question from:

- Negligence
- Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse
- Fraud and financial abuse

Children and the elderly in particular depend on the efforts and input of others to keep them safe, though various groups within the general adult population are also identified as vulnerable and in need of additional safeguarding.

What is the Purpose of Child Safeguarding?

The NSPCC outlines four primary child safeguarding objectives, which are as follows:

- protecting children from abuse and maltreatment
- preventing harm to children's health or development
- ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all children and young people to have the best outcomes.

Source: [NSPCC](#)

Anything that occurs with the best interests of the child in mind with a view to detecting and/or preventing mistreatment of any kind falls within the bracket of child safeguarding. Where child safeguarding is effective, the warning signs of abuse or neglect are picked up on at an early stage, allowing subsequent action to be taken to protect the child from harm.

Who is a Child?

Different countries and jurisdictions have their own interpretations of who is a 'child' and who isn't. Though in most western nations, a child is any person who hasn't yet reached 18 years of age.

Safeguarding children therefore applies in this context to individuals under the age of 18.

In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), it is the right of every child to be raised in an environment that is safe, healthy, positive and prioritises their wellbeing at all times.

Abuse and mistreatment can begin at any time in life or continue from childhood into adulthood, though efforts made to protect individuals aged 18 or over is generally classified as adult safeguarding.

The Six Safeguarding Principles

There are six primary safeguarding principles, which apply in the contexts of both adult and child safeguarding. Each of the following playing an important role in ensuring children are protected from harm:

Principle 1 - Empowerment

Proactive efforts should be made to empower children to make informed decisions and take control over their choices, which involves building their confidence, esteem and self-belief.

Principle 2 - Prevention

Every possible effort should be made to prevent abuse and mistreatment from occurring in the first place. Those who work with or come into contact with children on a regular basis should be appropriately trained and able to spot potential signs of abuse.

Principle 3 - Protection

This is the primary principle of child safeguarding, which promises that all necessary support will be provided to protect children from harm. Protection begins with prevention, though continues with detection and all subsequent actions taken.

Principle 4 - Proportionality

Though it is essential for action to be taken immediately upon the detection of suspected abuse or neglect, it must be proportional in nature. Any response to suspected neglect or abuse must be the least interfering matter in the issue.

Principle 5 - Partnerships

Child safeguarding is only effective when it takes place as a collective effort between numerous individuals and authorities. Strong and communicative partnerships must therefore be established and maintained within the community.

Principle 6 - Accountability

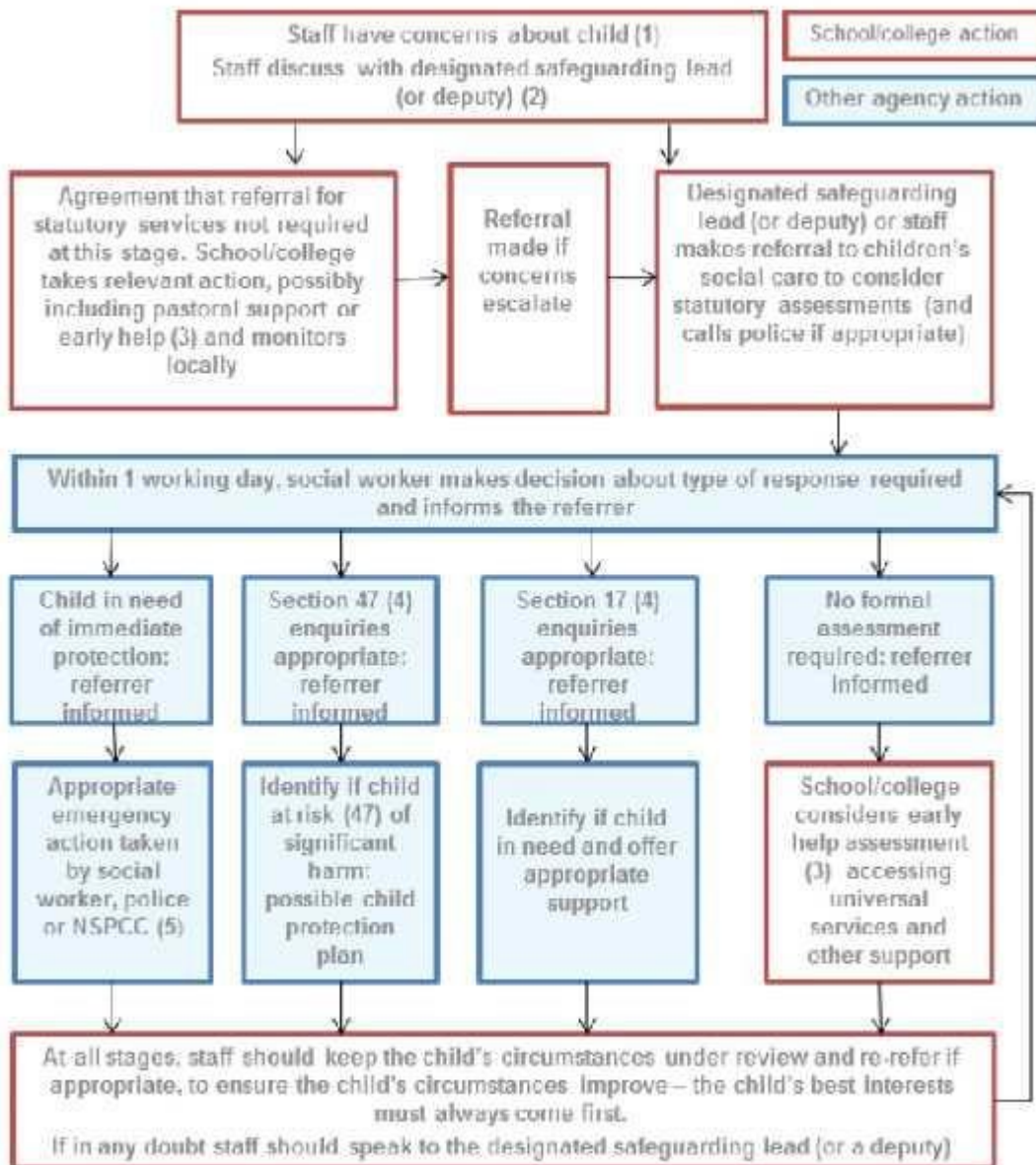
Accountability and transparency are also essential, meaning those who contribute to child safeguarding efforts must be honest, open and accountable for every action they take at all times.

Effective child safeguarding is only possible when every contributor to the child's education, development, care and protection in general fully understands the principles and requirements of child safeguarding.

As children spend the vast majority of their time (outside the home environment) at school, educators and school staff in particular must be sufficiently trained and empowered to play a direct role in safeguarding the children they work with.

Type of Actions if There is a Concern for Safeguarding a Child

A simplified outline of if and when appropriate action should be taken in the event of suspected child maltreatment or neglect is provided by the Department of Education in the UK, as follows:



Source: Gov.uk

- 1) In cases which also involve an allegation of abuse against a staff member, see Part four of this guidance.
- 2) If, for any reason, the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) is not available, this should not delay appropriate action being taken.
- 3) Chapter 1 of Working together to safeguard children provides detailed guidance on the early help process.

4) *Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities are required to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting their welfare. This can include section 17 and section 47 assessment. Chapter 1 of Working together to safeguard children provides detailed guidance on statutory assessments.*

5) This could include applying for an Emergency Protection Order (EPO).

Source: Gov.uk

Child Protection Policies in the UK: Definitions of Abuse

Statutory guidance from the UK government states that any form of neglect or abuse is considered maltreatment. Contrary to popular belief, the overwhelming majority of instances of abuse and mistreatment involving children occur at the hands of people known to them - often direct members of their own families, or close family friends.

By contrast, it is comparatively rare for mistreatment or abuse to occur at the hands of a stranger.

Episodes of abuse and neglect are not limited exclusively to direct instances of harm, but also where those who care for the child have failed to provide adequate protection from harm. Safeguarding children extends to all types of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, requiring proactive efforts on the parts of those involved to protect the child in question from all types of potential harm.

Physical Abuse

Types of maltreatment that fall within the bracket of physical abuse include anything with the potential to cause physical (bodily) harm to the child in question, such as throwing, pushing, shaking, burning, poisoning, suffocating and so on.

Emotional Abuse

The signs of emotional abuse are often more difficult to detect, as they tend to be invisible to the naked eye. However, the potential impact of emotional abuse can be even longer lasting than the effects of physical abuse. It can be a difficult category of abuse to define, given how episodes of emotional maltreatment differ significantly from one scenario to the next.

However, each of the following is considered a form of emotional abuse, with the potential to have a catastrophic impact on the child's health, development and wellbeing:

- Making a child feel inadequate or worthless
- Not providing a child with love and attention

- Preventing a child from socialising with others
- All types of threatening and intimidating behaviour
- Intensive and prolonged bullying of any kind
- Any type of child exploitation or grooming
- Excessively overprotective or dominating behaviour
- Treatment of a child as a commodity
- Deliberately and continuously hurting a child's feelings

These are just a few of the various examples of actions and behaviours categorised within the bracket of emotional abuse. For the most part, any non-physical form of maltreatment a child is exposed to that may detrimentally affect their health and wellbeing may be considered emotional abuse

Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse encompasses any behaviour or activity undertaken that persuades or forces a child below the age of consent to take part in sexual activities. Irrespective of whether the child in question consents to sexual activity, it is illegal if one or both of the partners is under the age of 16. Where an individual who takes part in sexual activity is under the age of 13, it is defined as rape under Section 5 Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Provoking children to behave in an inappropriate manner also falls within the bracket of sexual abuse, as does the production of indecent or pornographic materials depicting children.

What is Considered Neglect from a Child Safeguarding Perspective?

Neglect occurs when those responsible for a child do not adequately meet his or her essential physical and/or psychological needs. Neglect can be minor, moderate or severe in nature, though in all instances can have a serious impact on a child's physical and mental health.

According to the NSPCC, as many as one in every 10 children experiences some form of neglect. It is a broad and complex issue that can often be difficult to detect, calling for vigilance and proactivity in those working closely with children.

There are four primary types of neglect as outlined by the NSPCC:

- **Physical neglect**, wherein the basics physical needs of the child (like food and clothing) are not met sufficiently.
- **Educational neglect**, which refers to instances where a child is denied access to an appropriate education.
- **Emotional neglect**, in reference to the denial of the nurturing, kindness, care and attention a child needs.

- **Medical neglect**, which varies from ignoring a child's healthcare requirements to failing to comply with medical recommendations.

The signs of neglect are not always easy to spot, given how each instance of neglect is unique. However, there are several relatively common warning signs of neglect, which in all instances may call for an assessment of the child's welfare.

Examples of which include:

- Issues with personal hygiene and appearance
- Inappropriate clothing for the season
- Medical or dental issues
- Frequently missed appointments
- Regular illness or infections
- Tiredness and lethargy
- Weight or growth issues
- Living in an unsuitable environment
- Aggressive or abusive behaviour
- Being withdrawn, anxious or depressed
- Unusual or changing eating habits
- Obsessive behaviours
- Signs of self-harm
- Any use of alcohol or drugs

While none of these potential signs and symptoms confirm a case of neglect, they nonetheless indicate that something could be wrong and therefore should be looked into.

Again, the key to successful child safeguarding lies in the acknowledging that it is *everyone's* responsibility.

Safeguarding Responsibilities of School Staff

If you work in an educational setting of any kind, you have an obligation to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the children you work with. This applies to every member of staff working in an educational environment, including teachers, governors, head teachers, teaching assistants, classroom and playground supervisors, dinner staff, janitorial workers and so on.

People who work in educational environments are in a unique position to pick up on the potential signs of abuse or mistreatment at an early stage, in order that they can be addressed before being able to cause the child any further harm.

Under no circumstances should even the slightest indication of abuse or neglect be overlooked or ignored. Nor should it be interpreted as someone else's responsibility, other than your own.

Safeguarding Responsibilities in Schools

It's important for those who work in educational environments to understand that when a child has been exposed to mistreatment, they may be unaware of the fact that they are being abused. To them, the abuse or neglect they are experiencing is perfectly 'normal', given how they have no direct frame of reference.

Even in instances where children are aware they are experiencing mistreatment, they may be too afraid of the consequences to speak out.

Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 provides detailed guidance on the extent to which all educational environments - from early years education through to further education - must take proactive steps to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the children who attend.

It is the responsibility of all educators and staff working in educational environments to contribute to the development and maintenance of a safe and comfortable environment for children to learn, grow and develop.

The Safeguarding Responsibilities of Teachers

Teachers and educators must play a direct role in safeguarding the children they work with, though the risks children are exposed to are more varied and complex than many realise. Some of the more obvious signs of physical or and emotional abuse are easier to spot, whereas other forms of abuse or mistreatment can go undetected for some time.

Examples of which include the following:

- **Radicalisation.** Teachers are now formally obliged to watch for the potential warning signs of an individual within their care who may be vulnerable to radicalisation of any kind, given how it is something that often begins from an early age.
- **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).** Child sexual exploitation doesn't always involve a child's direct family members, but instead occurs when anyone attempts to coerce, manipulate, or deceive a child into sexual activity.
- **Grooming.** The term 'grooming' encompasses any instance where a person or group of individuals attempts to gain the trust of a child for the purposes of criminal activity, exploitation or sexual abuse.
- **Forced Marriage.** A surprisingly common problem in the UK and many overseas territories, where children are forced to marry against their will.

- **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).** Legislation was introduced relatively recently to outlaw all types of ritualistic female genital mutilation in the United Kingdom, though it is a practice that continues, nonetheless.
- **Bullying.** Bullying is a form of abuse that can be directed at a child from anyone they come into contact with on a regular or infrequent basis. Though often overlooked as an inevitability of the everyday classroom environment, bullying can have a devastating impact on a child's physical and psychological wellbeing.
- **Self-Harm and Self-Neglect.** It is usually indicative of a problem in a child's life if you pick up on any signs of self-neglect or self-harm. Simply becoming withdrawn and taking no interest or pleasure in their everyday activities can be a tell-tale sign of neglect or abuse.

All teachers and persons working in educational environments are required to undergo extensive child protection and safeguarded training, in order to ensure they are capable of protecting the children they work with.

However, it is a subject that should be revisited on a regular basis, in order to ensure the knowledge of teachers and staff members is appropriate and up to date.

Governing Body Child Safeguarding Responsibilities

Safeguarding children is not solely the responsibility of those who work with them directly on a daily basis. It is also the responsibility of the governing body to ensure that the school's policies and practices are compliant with all applicable child safeguarding legislation.

The responsibilities of the governing body extend to the following:

- **Safe Staff Recruitment.** Those responsible for recruiting teachers and general members of staff for schools and educational environments must ensure that they are safe to work with children. This means conducting appropriate background checks and screening/interviewing candidates in an appropriate manner.
- **Training and Development.** The governing body must also play a role in ensuring teachers and staff members have adequate access to child safeguarding training and educational resources, which must be updated on a regular basis.
- **School Security.** Governing bodies will also typically take responsibility for the physical security systems and general security protocols that cover the educational environment. This extends from the physical railings and gates that prevent unauthorised entrance through to CCTV cameras and the 'virtual' security measures implemented to prevent hackers gaining access to sensitive files/information.

- **Attendance Monitoring.** In conjunction with the school, the governing body must play a role in detecting patterns or potential discrepancies in children's attendance, which could in some instances suggest they're at risk of mistreatment or neglect.

Those who work for the governing body should also be provided with regular training and educational opportunities, in order to ensure they remain up to date at all times with any important developments or alterations to official child protection policy.

Reporting Safeguarding Concerns

Under no circumstances should any suspected sign of abuse, neglect or mistreatment be overlooked or ignored. If you work in an educational setting or have close contact with children in any capacity on a daily basis, it is *your* responsibility to take the appropriate action at the appropriate time.

This may mean bringing the suspected issue to the attention of your line manager or supervisor in your line of work - such as a headteacher, department head etc. In other instances, concerns can and should be reported directly in one of the following ways:

- Get in touch with the NSPCC directly for advice, who will tell you what to do next and/or relay your concerns to a child safeguarding team. (Tel. 0808 800 5000)
- Call the official NSPCC Whistleblowing advice line for information and support as to what to do next, or send them an e-mail at help@nspcc.org.uk.
- Find details of your local authority's child protection team online and get in touch with them directly.

Further Reading:

- ✓ Safeguarding Children and Young People by Steven Walker, 2012
- ✓ Safeguarding Children: A Shared Responsibility ,Hedy Cleaver, September 2012
- ✓ Child Protection Basics, FHI 360 Child Protection Toolkit © 2012 by FHI360