



Kirklees **Safeguarding Children** Board



# A framework for making safeguarding decisions in Kirklees

# Introduction

This document sets out our approach to keeping children in Kirklees safe and protected from harm. The guidance builds on 'conversations' with colleagues from all agencies over many months and in particular the work that has focused on Early Help and Early Support. The guidance is intended to help professionals embed into their practice a restorative and strengths based approach, and is designed to ensure that across the continuum of need professionals consider that the right help is given to the right children at the right time and for the right duration.

Most children and families welcome help and support from professionals involved in their lives, but we need to recognise that for some children and families who are struggling, professional intervention can add an extra layer of stress which they find challenging, shameful or difficult. Working with children and families should therefore be regarded as a privilege as well as a skilled task and our principles of practice must ensure that we do not delay in offering help where it is needed and might avoid problems escalating.

The Kirklees Safeguarding Children Board is committed to ensuring that this guidance will support professionals working with children, young people and their families to make good decisions and to focus on positive outcomes for children.

As safeguarding is everyone's business, it is important that everyone is clear about their roles and responsibilities. This is set out in guidance in Working Together and in the statutory framework. Working Together states that having a clear framework for making decisions regarding intervention and action, and ensuring that these are understood by all professionals is essential if children are to be kept safe. These decision making points set out a framework to ensure consistent practice for all children and help us to ensure that the right help is given to children at the right time.

Protecting children can involve professionals and practitioners having the difficult task of analysing complex information about human behaviour and risk. It is often not straightforward: it involves consideration about past and potential harm and family circumstances. It is also important to recognise that in order to gain a balanced picture then it is vital to obtain information regarding any past, existing and potential safety and strengths within the family, including the extended family and friends. This balance of information regarding family functioning allows the professionals to achieve a comprehensive assessment, which applies just as much when issues are first emerging as when a significant incident of harm is identified.

# Early Conversations

The Kirklees Framework for making good safeguarding decisions, encourages an approach that facilitates early discussion, conversation and dialogue when we have emerging worries about children. This document looks to promote safety and strengths in the family and their existing network to properly address concern on a long term basis. It also sets out how to recognise signs of harm and what to do when we have immediate concerns for children's safety, to prevent any delay in protecting them and/or gathering evidence where a crime has been committed. The approach recognises that no one practitioner may hold all the information needed to achieve a comprehensive and balanced analysis. It is only by sharing information on a multi- agency basis that a sound evidence base can be established and decisions made about the level of support and/or intervention that might be needed to meet a child's needs and keep them safe.

This Framework recognises that family members and children play an important role in shaping decision making. Even where the views of adults and the wellbeing of children are in conflict it is important to listen, and to involve all parties in the decision making, alongside any activity to protect children, whose safety must be paramount. Our principles of practice require us to be honest, open and transparent in explaining the assessments and decisions we make.

## Principles of Practice

It is important that all those working with children and their families work to a common set of principles that underpin good practice. These principles are drawn from the development of our work around early help, working locally together and from our systemic approach to seeing the strengths within families and adopting a restorative style.

Our principles include

- Being child centred
- Making decisions rooted in evidence
- Focused on outcomes
- Respectful for all people at all times
- Listening to family members and giving importance to what they say
- Building on strengths as well as identifying difficulty
- Hearing the voices of children and young people
- Communicating clearly regarding concern and what needs to happen to reduce those concerns
- Recognising the importance of a child's family and community
- Understanding the families individuality , beliefs , culture and spirituality
- Being honest and transparent
- Offering help early , doing all we can to keep intervention at the lowest possible and safe level

# How our services are organised

We believe that all children have a right to be healthy, happy and safe, to be loved, valued and respected and to have high aspirations for the future. We also recognise that children live in families and families live in communities. Ensuring that a good local offer is at the heart of the Kirklees approach is important, we know that our partnership, families and communities need to work together to make this happen.

Kirklees children's services deliver in four localities across the District, following operational policing boundaries, the clustering arrangements for schools, health visiting and school nursing. This provides the basis for our local offer. We want to develop a unifying but not uniform offer that reflects the local position and that builds on existing strengths and networks. We recognise that with regard to safeguarding, consistency and quality are important features of a required response. This Framework and its implementation therefore helps to ensure that across the whole District, regardless of location there is a consistent approach to decisions based on risk and need.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and by working together effectively and earlier we will reduce the number of children and young people requiring statutory interventions and reactive specialist services.

We are committed to ensuring that all children will have their needs met by universal services wherever possible, but we also recognise that some families at times, may need additional support for their children and that a smaller number of children may have their needs best met by living apart from their families.

This is never a static process: situations change and as a result so does need and risk. We need to understand that at times children's support may **Step up and** they may need more services and may **Step down** as interventions have impact, and their needs change.

# What do we mean when we say 'decision making points in safeguarding'

As professionals we describe services using four tiers, the language we use often makes little sense to those on the receiving end. The descriptions below describe how the jargon we use can be translated when talking to families.

It is important to recognise that understanding what is happening to a vulnerable child is a process, even when initiated by a single event. Safeguarding involves all those who may be working with a child or family and all the people involved in that child's life.

Effective safeguarding requires trust and communication and we must ensure that any changing circumstances are understood and put into context in terms of the impact on the child.

In Kirklees we have aligned our decision making approach to the Thrive Concept, this is the approach adopted to support children to reach their full potential, and it sits at the heart of approaches to Early support and to preventative work.

Universal services are accessible to all Kirklees children and families whatever the level of concern. Most children will have all their needs met within their own family and by working with one or more universal services like their school or health centre. Some children and their families require, at times, a co-ordinated multi-agency approach, and a Family Support plan to help identify and address emerging worries, build on existing strengths and access Early support services that can work with the family to help them. A much smaller number of children and families will need statutory involvement with a social worker leading to a children in need plan or a child protection plan because there are more immediate concerns for the welfare of the child or because it has not been possible to improve the quality of life for the child by working alongside the family with a family support plan.

Using the Thrive approach we describe these levels of involvement with professionals as follows.

Getting these decisions right can only be achieved by professionals and families working together, with honest communication and challenge and through evidence and evaluation.

<p><b>Getting Advice</b>  <b>Universal services:</b>  <b>What the professionals say:</b> Most children will be kept safe from harm and be able to reach their full potential with support from Kirklees universal services  <b>What we mean:</b> Schools ,nurseries , childminders , children’s centres, youth projects , local police , midwifery services , family GP, health visitors , job centre , housing officer , mentors , voluntary sector</p>	<p><b>Getting help</b>  <b>Early Support:</b>  <b>What the professionals say :</b> Some children and families will need some additional help for a while , if this can be provided as early as possible we can work together to stop problems getting worse  <b>What we mean:</b> Family support worker , a lead professional co-ordinating support</p>
<p><b>Getting more help</b>  <b>Children in Need:</b>  <b>What the professionals say:</b> For some children a holistic assessment of need by a social worker is needed to decide what ongoing multi-agency services and support are needed to keep them safe and to promote their wellbeing.  <b>What we mean:</b> Children in Need plan, targeted support , complex additional needs practical help , specialist health support , section 17 of</p>	<p><b>Getting risk support</b>  <b>Safeguarding</b>  <b>What the professionals say:</b> When children are thought to be at risk of significant harm, a multi-agency enquiry led by a social worker is required to assess the risk and to ensure children are protected.  <b>What we mean :</b>Section 47 enquiries , A child protection conference , core group meetings , statutory intervention , legal action</p>

## Conversation Opportunities

How we describe the level of help a family and children might need based on concerns is often the area for disagreement between professionals and between families. **Conversation opportunities** are the phone calls and meetings that take place between children and their families and between professionals across services. We want professionals who are concerned that something more is needed to improve the outcomes or quality of life for a child to talk to each other, this encourages the sharing of information, creates effective challenge and enables a climate of effective safeguarding. We see these conversations as ‘vantage points ‘to take stock of emerging issues, to effectively assess risk, and to share strengths and protective factor information.

Conversations need to be constructive, and need to follow the practice principles referred to in this guide. Sharing concern may be a starting point for a conversation but reviewing the support and services available to the child or young person must be made in the context of delivering the best outcomes. Many conversations will start with the child and their family because an anxiety or uncertainty has arisen regarding the welfare of a child. The value of knowledge and trust that a professional already working with a family has, must not be underestimated. Working with a child and their family to address worries as they arise, rather than waiting for concern to escalate is appropriate for the majority of children and can ensure much needed consistency for a family. Providing encouragement, building on strengths and sharing information with or about other services that might help are all key ingredients to promoting children’s wellbeing.

We must also recognise that where concerns regarding children exist there is often a story of family life, and there may be involvement from various agencies with family members. Different professionals will each have important knowledge and a crucial role to play in supporting a family. This highlights why conversations are important and why drawing professionals and families together in a coordinated way is helpful to everyone. It also helps create clarity about who is best placed to lead work with the family, and this might not be children's social care, it may be someone already involved or an agency who the family think will work best for them. These approaches are a core element of the approaches allied to this framework such as the early support strategy.

Most important is knowing when it is appropriate to make contact with statutory services to discuss safeguarding concerns. Sometimes this will be because the Early support provided is not working and things are not getting better for the child. Generally this should be discussed and agreed with the parents carers and other agencies first, however sometimes it is because of an incident, or an injury to a child, or something a child has said that suggests they are a risk of harm or have been harmed. While the expectation is that all professionals working with children have training to ensure they recognise child protection concerns, they should never be discouraged from seeking specialist safeguarding advice either within their own agency or directly with the Multi Agency Front Door, who may hold additional information that put anxieties or concerns into context. A consultation with the Front Door should be regarded as the most vital conversation opportunity.

A strong and simple focus for conversations about need and risk focuses on four simple questions

1. **What are we worried about?**
2. **What is working well?**
3. **What needs to happen?**
4. **How worried are we as a professional network on a scale of 1-10?**

The last question provides an opportunity for the multi-agency network to share and explore differing views around need and risk and to resolve disagreements about how best to offer support to reduce levels of concern. This approach is grounded in collaboration and partnership; promotes shared responsibility and flexibility; recognises the unique needs of each individual and family; and is intended to reduce agency bias- giving us a clear Framework to facilitate dialogue and map need and risk effectively.



# Do I always have to consent to share information about a family, or a child?

In general conversations about what is worrying you should happen with the family first, to test if they share the concerns and worries and to assess help that might be needed. If parents understand that you are trying to help and are willing to work with you, they may be open to you making a referral to obtain the help they require, which will need their explicit consent.

Consent means the family are fully informed about the services they are being referred to, agree with the referral being made and understand what information will be exchanged and why. It is important to be honest from the outset and to respect the right to privacy of individuals.

While it is good practice to seek consent for making any referral, there are some exceptions when it comes to protecting children and these are referred to in the new GDPR guidance. For example if having a conversation with the family would place the child, another child, someone else or you the referrer at increased risk of suffering harm you do not need consent. You also don't need consent if it might undermine the investigation of a serious crime. This includes making a child protection referral for a child who has made an allegation about a safeguarding issue, or where delay in getting consent may mean the child or young person is put at risk of further harm.

In such circumstances it is vital that the decision is based on good evidence, and that it is recorded fully including an assessment of risk as to why consent was not sought. It is also important that you record

# What happens if you don't agree with decisions made and you remain concerned about a child?

Through good quality conversations that are constructive, a consensus as to next steps will be reached in most cases. However sometimes there might be disagreement as to how the child's needs can best be met in these cases;

- Talk in the first instance to your line manager or the designated lead for child protection in your organisation
- Check that in your referral you included all the relevant information and that you clearly articulated the things you are worried about
- If you are still unhappy with the decision making the conversation should be progressed in line with the **Dispute Resolution policy** shown on the KSCB website.

## Useful contacts and resources

There are some useful resources to be accessed on the Kirklees Safeguarding Children's Board website, these support opportunities for further learning. These include links to practice resources around Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Sexual Abuse, Neglect and other safeguarding issues. There is also multi-agency training to support staff develop their skills in working with families.

Further advice and support is available through designated safeguarding leads in all agencies.