

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

Headlines

Abuse and neglect of anyone is intolerable, especially of children and vulnerable adults.

- Nearly 400 children now have a child protection plan; this continues to increase and the rate locally is now above the national rate.
- Emotional abuse has taken over from neglect as the main form of abuse experienced by children in Kirklees.
- The majority of adult abuse notifications concerned older people and people with learning disabilities. Of the more than 400 substantiated cases of adult abuse over half were due to neglect.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. All staff who have direct or indirect contact with children, families and vulnerable adults, or who have access to information about them, have a responsibility to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Why is this issue important?

The maltreatment of children – physically, emotionally, sexually or through neglect – can have major long-term effects on all aspects of a child's health, development and wellbeing. The immediate and longer term impact can include anxiety, depression, substance misuse, eating disorders and self-destructive behaviours, offending and anti-social behaviour. Maltreatment is likely to have a deep impact on the child's self-image and self-esteem, and on his or her future life. Difficulties may extend into adulthood: the experience of long-term abuse may lead to difficulties in forming or sustaining close relationships, establishing oneself in work, and to extra difficulties in developing the attitudes and skills necessary to be an effective parent.

It is not only the stressful events of maltreatment that have an impact, but also the context in which they take place. Often, it is the interaction between a number of factors that increases the likelihood or level of significant harm.

The experience of abuse and neglect is likely to have a significant impact on an adult's health and wellbeing. By its very nature, abuse – the misuse of power by one person over another – has a large impact on a person's independence. Neglect can prevent a person

who is dependent on others for their basic needs exercising choice and control over the fundamental aspects of their life and can cause humiliation and loss of dignity.

The high cost of abuse and neglect, both to individuals and to society, underpins the duty on all agencies to be proactive in safeguarding children.

There is a duty on organisations to make appropriate arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. It is a shared responsibility and effectiveness depends upon commissioning activity, and efficient joint working between agencies to respond to incidents of abuse. In addition, there is an increasing focus on preventing abuse occurring in the first place. Analysis of information on any potential trends could assist with both prevention and response.

What significant factors are affecting this issue?

Anyone can abuse. It can be a stranger or someone well known, a family member, a health or social care professional or voluntary worker. Sometimes loving carers can abuse because they have become stressed and exhausted.

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Children have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, physically or mentally. Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents or anyone else who looks after them¹.

Dealing with and responding to the issues of risk is complex. There are many levels of response that can be provided to support vulnerable people. It is only as a last resort that compulsory intervention in family life should be instigated. Both children's and adult services need to co-ordinate their work to ensure that the family as a whole is supported to achieve the best possible outcomes for children.

The public also have their role to play in identifying issues that may affect the safety or wellbeing of vulnerable people in Kirklees. Bringing issues of risk to the attention of professionals provides further protective factors for vulnerable people.

A child protection plan is the activity undertaken to protect a child who is at risk of significant harm. It sets out in detail what work each of the professionals involved will do and what action family members must take. There has been a steady increase in the number of children with a child protection plan to around 392 in February 2013; the

Kirklees rate was above the national rate, 41 per 10,000 compared to 38.7 per 10,000. This compares with 26 per 10,000 last year. This could reflect changes in practice and more awareness amongst staff, rather than an underlying increase in child protection cases.

Emotional abuse (162 children) has taken over from neglect (133 children) as the main form of abuse experienced by children in Kirklees; emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child that causes severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child.

Other children are the subject of child protection plans for physical abuse (44 children) and sexual abuse (39 children).

Based on national estimates, around 6,000 children a year in Kirklees witness domestic violence³. This can have devastating effects on those children. Any domestic violence incidents that we become aware of where children are present are notified to children's social care for assessment. From June 2009 to February 2010 there were 2,348 domestic violence incidents reported to Kirklees children's social care (see domestic abuse section).

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The Human Rights Act (1988) placed a duty on public agencies to intervene to protect the rights of citizens. These rights include Article 2, "The right to life", Article 3, "Freedom from torture" (including humiliating and degrading treatment) and Article 8, "The right to family life" (one that sustains the individual).

The abuse of adults can take many forms:

- Physical abuse – violence that causes pain or injury.
- Sexual abuse – unwanted sexual or touching behaviour without consent.
- Psychological abuse – anything said or written which causes emotional distress or anxiety.
- Neglect and acts of omission – the failure to provide care or attention to the point where a person's health or safety is affected.
- Discriminatory abuse – unfair treatment because of a person's race, gender, sexual choice, religion or disability.

- Financial or material abuse – the theft or misuse of a person’s property, money, possessions or benefits⁴.

Abuse may occur in a vulnerable adult’s home, a relative’s or friend’s home, in nursing, residential or day care settings, in hospitals, custodial settings, or any other public place previously assumed safe. Abuse can occur once, several times, or many times over a period of days, weeks, months or years.

Social/situational factors that increase the risk of abuse may include for instance:

- Being cared for in a care setting, with the risk of loss of choice and control, and reliance on the assistance of others for everyday needs.
- Not getting the right amount or the right kind of care that they need.
- Isolation and social exclusion.
- Stigma and discrimination.
- Lack of access to information and support.
- Being the focus of anti-social behaviour.

Personal characteristics of the adult at risk that increase vulnerability may include for instance:

- Not having the mental capacity to make decisions about their own safety including fluctuating mental capacity associated with mental illness.
- Communication difficulties.
- Being reliant on the assistance of others for personal care and activities of daily life.
- Low self-esteem.
- Experience of abuse.
- Childhood experience of abuse.

The Abuse of Vulnerable Adults intelligence for 2010-2011 shows that there were 2,285 alerts, or notifications of potential abuse victims; of these 420 were found to need further investigation and were referred into the formal safeguarding process. Following investigations 58% (244) of referrals were found to be substantiated in their allegations of

abuse. Support or signposting to other services was offered to those not referred into the safeguarding process.

The types of abuse reported as part of this 420 were: neglect – 52% (218), physical or sexual abuse – 29% (122) and financial abuse – 19% (80). Of these 13% were repeat referrals. The main victims of abuse were [older people](#) and people with learning disabilities⁵.

This is broadly in line with regional and national trends and reflects the implementation of multi-agency procedures, publicity to highlight issues of abuse and specific work undertaken within partner agencies, independent service providers and community groups. It is important to note that the safeguarding referrals are constantly being learned from, and constant training is on offer to the care sector so staff and service users are clear about their rights and responsibilities around safeguarding.

Which groups are most affected by this issue?

Vulnerable people may be at risk anywhere. While sharing common themes of risk, each group or community may also have specific issues. The diversity of Kirklees people means that the workforce must have the necessary skills and resources to be able to identify and provide an appropriate response to all cases where vulnerable children and adults are, or potentially could be, at risk from harm.

Where is this causing greatest concern?

[Batley, Birstall & Birkenshaw](#) had the highest rate of children with a child protection plan, 4.9 per 1,000 compared to the lowest 1.4 per 1,000 in Spen.

What could commissioners and service planners consider?

- Continue accessible training to give people, especially those staff and volunteers working in settings that mean they are more likely to come into contact with children or vulnerable adults who are at risk of abuse, the skills to identify concerns and how to ensure that appropriate action is taken is crucial, especially in cases of neglect.
- Ensure the support provided by children's, adult and family services is co-ordinated and takes account of how individual problems can affect the whole family. Joint commissioning of services to support children affected by neglect, domestic

violence, parental alcohol and/or substance misuse will ensure issues are identified quickly.

- Safeguarding must remain central to our joint health and social care commissioning strategies and other plans for children and young people's services. For example, all mental health contracts in the voluntary sector require specific compliance with Local Authority safeguarding requirements. This theme is echoed in the performance management framework in place with key providers. The new care programme approach policy must be very clear about safeguarding.

References

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