

# Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

## Headlines

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

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. All staff who, during the course of their employment, 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.

- The number of children with a child protection plan is increasing and the rate locally is now above the national rate.
- The main form of abuse experienced by children with a child protection plan is neglect, except in Huddersfield south.
- There were more than 2,300 alleged victims of adult abuse and more than 1,700 alleged perpetrators in 2009-10.

## Why is this group important?

Abuse and neglect of anyone is intolerable especially of children and vulnerable adults. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. All staff who, during the course of their employment, 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. Not only is there a duty on organisations to make appropriate arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults, but it is a shared responsibility and effectiveness depends upon joint working between agencies and professionals who have different roles and expertise.

## What significant factors are affecting this group?

Possible factors that influence neglect can be social deprivation, family circumstances, the parents' own developmental history, poor education, parental mental health, drug and/or alcohol misuse.

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.

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 it can occur many times over a period of days, weeks, months or years.

## Safeguarding children

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 them<sup>1</sup>.

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, and the Kirklees rate was above the national rate, 2.9 per 1000 compared to 2.7 per 1000, respectively<sup>2</sup>. This could reflect changes in practice and more awareness amongst staff, rather than an underlying increase in child protection cases.

Neglect is the main form of abuse in Kirklees children (36%) except in Huddersfield south where emotional abuse was the most common (but small numbers). Neglect is failing to provide basic essential care of children. It happens when a parent or carer fails to provide adequate food, housing, clothes, medical care or necessary supervision to protect children from physical harm or danger.

Neglect also includes failure to ensure access to education or failure to look after a child because the carer is under the influence of alcohol, drugs or may have some mental health issues that can affect their ability to care for their child. The other causes were emotional abuse 29%, multiple causes 30% with physical or sexual abuse accounting for less than 3%.

## Domestic violence

"Prolonged or regular exposure to domestic violence can have a serious impact on a child's development and emotional wellbeing, despite the best efforts of the victim's parent to protect the child." (West Yorkshire Consortium Procedures).

Nationally at least 750,000 children a year witness domestic violence<sup>3</sup>. It can have devastating effects on those children. Any domestic violence incidents 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.

## Safeguarding adults

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 benefits<sup>4</sup>.

Locally, in the year to 31 March 2010 there were 1,680 notifications of alleged adult abuse. There were 2,369 alleged victims and 1,768 alleged perpetrators. Most notifications were from the independent care sector, 699 (2 in 5, 42%), and adult services, 387 (nearly 1 in 4, 23%). The main victims were older people, 1,571 (2 in 3, 66%), and people with learning disabilities, 382 (1 in 6, 16%). The most common form of alleged abuse were neglect, 1,048 (more than 2 in 5, 42%), physical, 686 (1 in 3, 29%), and financial, 268 (1 in 10, 11%). The alleged victims were predominately white, 2,174.

The increase in referrals is similar to nationally. Locally the increase reflects the implementation of new multi-agency procedures, new publicity and specific work undertaken within partner agencies, independent service providers and community groups. It also reflects the way Kirklees currently records safeguarding concerns in care settings.

## Which specific groups are affected most?

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 1000 compared to the lowest 1.4 per 1000 in Spen. It is worth noting that this could reflect changes in practice and more awareness amongst staff, rather than an underlying increase in child protection cases.

## What could commissioners and service planners consider?

Continue accessible training to give people 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 remains central to our joint health and social care commissioning strategies. 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 provider trusts. The new care programme approach policy will be very clear about safeguarding.

---

## References

1. United Nations Treaty Collection. Convention on the Rights of the Child. 1989.
2. NHS Kirklees, Kirklees Council and West Yorkshire Police. Young People's Survey (YPS). 2009.
3. Department of Health. Women's Mental Health: Into the Mainstream - Strategic Development of Mental Health Care for Women. 2002  
<http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/07/54/87/04075487.pdf>
4. Kirklees Safeguarding Adults Board. Multi Agency Policy, Procedures and guidance to safeguard vulnerable adults from abuse in Kirklees 2009.