

Deaf children, safeguarding and the new Working Together guidance

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Risk of abuse

Disabled children 3.4 times more likely to be abused

- 3.8 neglect
- 3.8 physical abuse
- 3.1 sexual abuse
- 3.9 emotional abuse

Sullivan and Knutson (2000)

Risk of abuse

- 45.8% of deaf girls and 42.4% deaf boys exposed to unwanted sexual experiences
- More than twice as often for girls and three times for boys compared to hearing children
- Nearly half reported the abuser was deaf
- Half of abuse took place in special schools
- 49% didn't tell. 11% were not believed

Kvam (2004)

Risk of abuse

- Research indicates that disabled children are significantly more likely to experience abuse than their non-disabled peers
- Evidence suggests increased vulnerability for children with communication impairments, behavioural disorders, learning disabilities and sensory impairments (compared to disabled children as a whole)

Stalker and McArthur (2012)

Bullying

- Every child knew about bullying
- Evoked high levels of feelings
- Most had been bullied
- More than half had bullied others
- Many ideas and suggestions
- Adults should take it seriously

Triangle consultation for NSPCC 2007

Reasons for increased risk: Attitudes and assumptions

- Devaluing of deaf children, their experiences and their needs
- Lack of awareness about cultural issues or deaf development issues
- Reluctance to believe that deaf children are abused
- Minimisation of harm done
- Attributing indicators of possible abuse to child's deafness eg child's mood, behaviour
- Reluctance to challenge parents/carers and professionals

Gaps in effective provision of support services

- Inaccessible community and support services
- Lack of communication and consultation with deaf children
- Lack of personal safety skills education, accessible information and access to confidential advice
- Skills gap between workers with deaf children and children protection
- Lack of child focus in assessments
- Lack of co-ordinated multi-agency working
- Resource constraints

The deaf child and social interactions

- Social exclusion and isolation
- Poor self esteem, self-image and self-confidence
- Lack of awareness and vocabulary to understand about abuse and be able to seek help
- Limited trusted sources of support with relevant communication skills to turn to for help
- Deaf child specifically targeted
- Inappropriate attitudes and behaviours resulting from abuse, especially where child's therapeutic needs unmet

Barriers in the child protection process: Recurring themes

- Lack of focus on the child's needs
- Assessments not sufficiently holistic
- Lack of communication with the child
- Failure to recognise risk and apply appropriate thresholds
- Professional skills gap
- Multi-agency working

Joint Chief Inspectors' report on Safeguarding (2005);

Ofsted (2009, 2012);

National Working Group on Child Protection and Disability (2003)

Barriers to recognition of abuse

Protecting disabled children: Thematic inspection (Ofsted 2012) some key issues:

- Early concerns and emerging risks mostly tackled well
- Children in need work not always well co-ordinated
- Many plans lacked detail and focus on outcomes
- Reviews did not always include all professionals working with the child
- Lack of rigour increased the likelihood of child protection concerns not being identified early enough
- Delays in identifying thresholds for child protection when concerns less clear cut, especially neglect
- Assessments not consistently identify and analyse key risk factors leading to delays in support and intervention

Children's Services, deaf children and child protection

- Only 37% responding Local Authorities described co-working arrangements between child protection teams and specialist social workers
- 18% no co-working arrangement at all
- Others described various arrangements for getting help of different varieties within or outside the Local Authority

Young, Hunt, Oram and Smith (2009)

Working Together

- Streamlines previous guidance documents
- Strengthen focus away from processes onto the needs of the child
- Most responsibilities and procedures remain the same

Working Together: Effective safeguarding systems

- the child's needs are paramount
- every child receives the support they need before a problem escalates
- all professionals are alert to children and family's needs and any risks of harm
- all professionals share appropriate information in a timely way
- high quality professionals are able to use their expert judgement

Working Together: Effective safeguarding systems

- all professionals contribute to safeguarding and regularly review outcomes for the child
- local areas innovate and changes are informed by evidence and examination of the data

Two key principles:

- safeguarding is everyone's responsibility
- a child-centred approach

Working Together: Changes from the 2010 guidance

- LSCBs should publish a threshold document
- Social care decision to be made on type of response required within one day of referral
- No longer separate initial and core assessments
- Maximum timeframe for the assessment to conclude should be 45 working days
- Assessment: Continual process
- Local authorities, with their partners, should develop and publish local protocols for assessment
- Every LSCB should have an independent chair

Working Together

Changes: Learning and improvement

- LSCBs should maintain a local learning and improvement framework
- Regular reviews on cases which can provide valuable lessons about how organisations are working together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (in addition to cases which meet statutory requirements)
- LSCBs may use any learning model which is consistent with the principles in the guidance, including systems methodology
- Final reports of SCR findings must be published on the LSCB's website

Findings from trial authorities on flexible approaches to the assessment of children in need (July 2012)

- Removing nationally set targets enabled the length and depth of assessment to be shaped by the case itself
- Conflating the initial and core assessments can reduce duplication
- It is difficult to “*cut social workers loose*” to exercise professional judgment. Support, training and the active management of risk by senior professionals should not be underestimated
- Flexibilities over timescales are only part of the issue. The quality of the workforce is the driving factor
- Trial authorities did not dispense with timescales completely – they set local parameters
- Trials have emphasised the need for a rigorous performance management framework and active supervision

Safeguarding deaf children

Key issues

- Valuing deaf children and their experiences
- Accessible community and support services
- Effective implementation for deaf children of policies and practices that safeguard children and promote wellbeing
- Empowering deaf children in their daily lives
- Professional skills gap addressed
- Effective multi-agency working

Safeguarding deaf children

Individual level

- Developing own awareness of safeguarding and deaf children
- Consulting with deaf children
- Advocating for the deaf child's wellbeing
- Developing/supporting sex and relationship and safety skills education
- Ensuring opportunities for deaf children to seek help
- 'Listening' and responding to concerns

Safe

Personal safety skills
for deaf children



NSPCC 
Cruelty to children must stop. **FULL STOP.**