Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership

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WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

THAMES VALLEY POLICE

Getting the right help in Wokingham

PUBLIC

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You can contact the Wokingham Integrated Front Door and MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) on 0118 908 8002

(9am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday)

Outside of normal office hours contact the Emergency Duty Team on 01344 351999

Email: triage@wokingham.gov.uk

Remember, if you are uncertain about making a referral you can contact the Front Door for advice before doing so

Introduction

Wokingham's local approach

In Wokingham, we want children, young people, families and the people who support them to know where to turn when they need help. We are bringing together the services that support children and families so that the support offer is clearer, easier to access and joined up.

Wokingham is developing a new single point of access (integrated Front Door for children and families). Many people will currently know this as MASH. By March 2027, the Integrated Front Door will bring together advice, information and decision-making so that children, young people and families are connected to the right support more quickly. Helping earlier is central to this approach working with our Family Hubs and Family Help service, alongside schools, health services, early years settings, community groups and other trusted local services.

This document describes Wokingham's response to the different kinds of help children and families may need. It explains how families, their networks and professionals can access information, advice, Family Hub support, Family Help and safeguarding intervention. It also explains how worries about welfare or safety can be raised, including our Child Protection pathway.

Our Families First programme brings help, support and safeguarding together around children and families. We have brought targeted early help and child in need support together within our Family Help service, strengthening family-led decision making and promoting support that is inclusive, timely and proportionate. We want families to get help earlier, closer to their communities, and through relationships that can continue as needs change.

We recognise that every child is unique and every family is different and there is a need for us to work with different agencies in order to secure the right help and support, at the right time. This guidance cannot cover every situation but supports our shared partnership approach across children's services, education, health, police, community and voluntary sector organisations. We work together to help to recognise need early, respond in a coordinated way, keep children safe and help families to thrive.

Where families or professionals are unsure, we encourage them to seek advice so that children and families can be connected to the right help, at the right time, from the right person.

National context

A clear legal framework underpins how help, support and safeguarding are provided to all children (Children Act 2004 & Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026). Many children and families will get the help they need through universal and community-based services, including our Family Hub offer. Where needs are greater or more complex, agencies need to work together, as defined within *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026* and the principles of the *Families First Partnership Programme*.

Family Help may include support under the Children Act 1989. Where there are serious worries about a child's safety, statutory safeguarding duties may apply, and in some situations the local authority may need to provide accommodation or ask the court to make legal orders. National reform also strengthens the role of family networks, including Family Group Decision Making and Family Network Support Packages, so that families and kinship networks can be supported to make safe plans for children wherever possible.

- Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need and, where appropriate, to provide services to them and their families.
- Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 places a duty on the local authority to make enquiries if there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.
- Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 allows the local authority to provide accommodation for a child where this is needed and agreed, for example because there is no one able to care for them safely.
- Section 31 of the Children Act 1989 provides the legal threshold for the local authority to apply to court for a Care Order or Supervision Order where a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

Wokingham's local practice model and principles, set out below, explain how we put this national and legal framework into practice for children and families.

Practice model and core principles

We recognise that children grow up in families and within their communities. Our Practice Framework is relational, systemic, strengths-based and takes a whole-family approach. We work with children, young people, families and communities in ways that build trust, recognise strengths, understand lived experience and support safe, lasting change.

Children and families may need different kinds of help at different times. The sections below describe how we respond to need in Wokingham, what help may be offered, and which practitioners may be involved. This is not about moving families through fixed thresholds. It is about matching help and safety planning to the child's needs and risks in a timely, proportionate and joined-up way.

Our approach is guided by these principles:

- Children's lived experiences are central. We seek to understand what life is like for a child every day, what is working well, what is worrying and what needs to change.
- We work with families, not do things to them. We build trust, listen well, recognise strengths and work alongside families to find solutions.
- Help should come early, be easy to access and be close to home. Family Hubs provide a clear route to universal support, advice, guidance and community-based early help.
- Families should experience one joined-up system. Family Hubs, Family Help and safeguarding working together so support feels coordinated, clear and easier to navigate.
- Children, families and networks should be involved in decisions. Children's voices matter, and wider family and kinship networks should be included early where they can help with safety, care and stability.
- The right people should step in when needed and step back when they can. As needs change, practitioners work together so children and families experience continuity in relationships, assessment, planning and support.
- Support must be inclusive and responsive to difference. Practice should recognise disability, special educational needs, culture, identity, family context and the impact of discrimination or inequality. Practitioners should be curious and reflective about how assumptions, bias and barriers may affect how children and families are understood and supported.
- When children are not safe, we act quickly and work together to protect them. Safeguarding and protecting children should be timely, clear and joined up, while continuing to build on family strengths and support networks wherever possible.

How to get help

The Front Door: one point of access

Wokingham is developing a single, joined-up single point of access, an Integrated Front Door for families and professionals who are worried about a child or need advice about support. The Integrated Front Door brings together information, advice and decision-making so that we can understand what is happening for the child and family, identify strengths and worries, and connect children and families to the right help as quickly as possible.

Families can contact the Integrated Front Door directly if they are worried about a child or would like advice, information or support. Practitioners should usually speak with the family first about the worries, the help that may be needed and why they are contacting the Front Door, completing a Multi-Agency Referral Form (MARF). Information should be shared openly with families unless doing so could place a child or another person at greater risk of harm.

What happens when I contact the Front Door?

The Front Door will ask about the child's needs, strengths, family circumstances, current support and any worries about safety. The response may include advice and information, signposting to local services, accessing support through the Family Hub offer, Family Help, or, where there are serious worries about a child's safety, Family Help alongside Child Protection enquiries under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

What makes a good referral?

A good referral helps the Front Door understand the child's lived experience, the worries, what is working well, what support has already been tried and what help is being requested. It should include:

- **Who is involved:** include accurate details for the child, parents, carers and relevant family members, including address, date of birth, ethnicity, language needs, parental responsibility and whether an interpreter is needed.
- **Professional network:** include your role, agency, contact details, relationship with the family and other professionals already involved.
- **What is happening:** explain the current worries, relevant history, recent changes, what the child and family have said, and what you have seen or heard.
- **Strengths, risks and evidence:** be clear about what is working well, what you are worried about, what is fact and what is professional judgement. Explain any "niggling worries" clearly.
- **Help already tried:** explain what support the family, your agency or other services have already offered, what helped and what has not changed.

- **What help is needed:** say what outcome is being sought and whether the family may need universal services, Family Hubs, Family Help or a safeguarding response.
- **Working with the family:** concerns should usually be discussed with the child and family before a referral is made, unless this could increase risk. Explain what has been shared and the family's views.
- **Information sharing and consent:** Under the new information sharing duty which comes into effect from September 2026 in line with the Children's and Wellbeing Schools Act 2026, information must be shared where it is relevant to safeguarding and promoting a child's welfare, including where concerns relate to early help, prevention and unmet need. Where possible and safe to do so, transparency and honesty is important, and it is best practice to inform children and parents where information has been shared.
- **Immediate danger or out of hours:** if a child is in immediate danger, contact the police first and then the Front Door. Outside office hours, contact the Emergency Duty Service on 01344 351999 before making a written referral.

How to use this document

This document is for families and practitioners. It explains the help that is available when a child, young person or family needs advice, support or safeguarding, including unborn babies where there are worries before birth. It also supports professional judgement, shared understanding and timely decision-making.

For families, the aim is to make the system easier to understand and access. For practitioners, the aim is to support a joined-up response between agencies and across Family Hubs, Family Help and statutory safeguarding, so families do not experience services as separate or confusing.

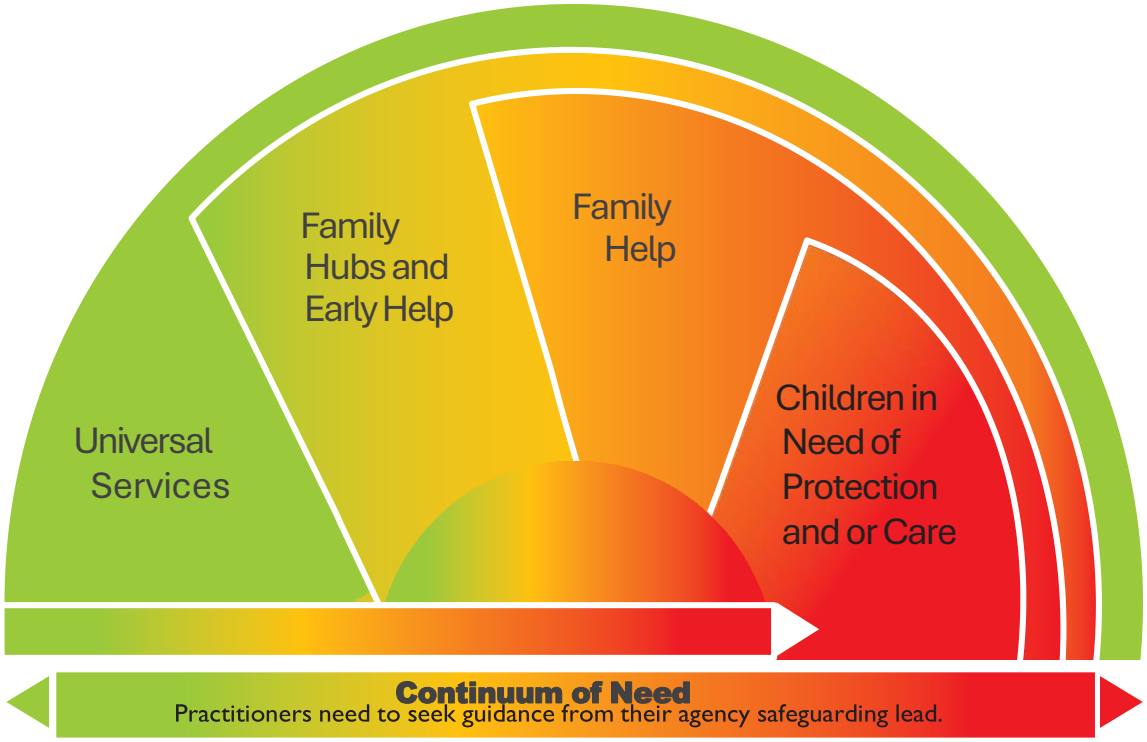
Everyone working with children and families has a role in noticing when help may be needed, listening well, acting early and working together. Families should be involved in decisions wherever possible, and children's voices must always be heard.

Children and families' circumstances can change, sometimes quickly. Practitioners should understand the different responses to need so that help can increase or reduce without children falling between services. Wherever possible, the right practitioners should join the child and family's network when needed and step back when things improve, so relationships and plans remain consistent.

The examples in this document are illustrative only and do not replace professional judgement. Practitioners should always consider the whole child, family context, protective factors and the impact on the child's lived experience.

Our continuum of support

- **Universal services:** Support that is available to all children, young people and families, such as health, education, early years, youth services, voluntary and community support. Families can use universal services at any point, including when they are also receiving more targeted help.
- **Family Hubs and community-based early help:** A welcoming and easily accessible route to advice, information, activities and support close to home. Some support can be accessed directly, and some may need a referral. Family Hubs should remain part of a family's support network even where more specialist help is also involved.
- **Family Help:** Coordinated support for children and families whose needs are higher, more complex or changing. Family Help brings together targeted early help and child in need support, with partner agencies working with one plan and a lead practitioner wherever possible so families do not have to retell their story or move unnecessarily between services.
- **Statutory safeguarding and safety planning:** Support when there are serious worries that a child is not safe or may be at risk of significant harm. This may include Child Protection enquiries, a Child Protection Plan, legal planning or care arrangements. Family Help will remain involved so that support, relationships and plans stay joined up.



Responses to need and help

Universal Services, Community-Based Early Help and Family Hubs

Universal Services

Universal services are the everyday services and support available to all children, young people and families to promote their health, learning, and wellbeing. They do not require a referral and are usually delivered through everyday contact with children and families.

They include health, midwifery, health visiting, education, early years provision, youth services, community groups and other local support. Families may use universal services at any point, including when they are also receiving more targeted help.

Family Hubs

In March 2026 Wokingham launched two Family Hubs. By November 2028 all of our children's centres will be Best Start Family Hubs.

There will be three main hubs and three network sites across Wokingham taking a whole family approach and will offer support for families with children aged 0 to 19, and up to 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Care leavers will be supported through our Care Leavers Hub, to launch in Autumn 2026.

We recognise that all families need support at one time or another and seeking help and support should be easy and accessible. Family Hubs offer a range of support and provide a welcoming place where families can access advice, guidance, activities and community-based support. Help starts in pregnancy and continues through childhood and adolescence, supporting families to build safe, healthy relationships and connect with services and local networks.

In addition to our Family Hubs our Togetherness Platform provides a range of online support and advice for families.

Free online wellbeing support from Togetherness

Best Start Family Hubs Core Offer

Our Family Hub programme and offer is growing and has been shaped by what local communities need. It includes stay and play sessions, baby groups, parent and carer support, dad's groups, infant feeding advice, SEND advice, support for children with additional needs, perinatal mental health support, advice about money or debt, and links to wider community services. In the Ambleside hub in Woodley, parents will also be able to register their baby's birth.

Family Hubs are part of a wider network of support. They can help families find the right service, connect with more specialist advice where needed, and build friendships and social connections that continue beyond the hub itself. Midwives work in all our Hubs.

A digital youth offer - a co-produced digital place to go for young people to find what's on offer - is available on the Council website. The young people directory of services can be found here.

How to Access Family Hub Services

Families can access support directly through their local Family Hub or by applying for membership online here: Children's Centres and Best Start Family Hubs membership.

Family Hubs offer community connection and can offer early support for those everyday parenting dilemmas. They can also offer support when families begin to experience challenges, such as worries about a child's emotional wellbeing, behaviour, sleep, routines, school attendance, SEND, housing, money or family pressures. Support may include advice, parenting support, practical help and links to local services.

Practitioners can also refer families to their local Family Hub for advice, information and help to connect with other support services; a referral can be made via a Multi-Agency Referral Form following which the Family Hub Partnership Forum will consider with the family how best support can be provided and connected with services across Family Hubs. The outcome will depend on the family's circumstances and may include agreeing a lead professional to coordinate support with the family.

Safeguarding procedures must always be followed where there are worries that a child may be at risk of serious harm. If unsure, seek advice from the Front Door for Families. Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities is available through Family Hubs alongside universal, community and specialist services. Families can access information, advice and guidance through Family Hubs and the SEND Local Offer, helping children take part in everyday activities, make progress and, in some cases, reducing the need for statutory plans.

Where children or families have more complex needs, additional support may be provided through services such as the Children with Disabilities Service or our Family Help Service. This can include support with sleep, behaviour, autism and short breaks. Family Hubs can help families understand what is available and how to access the right support.

For most families, needs can be met through Family Hubs, education settings, health services, SEND support and voluntary and community organisations. Where more than one service is involved, or needs are complex, a lead professional may coordinate support with the family.

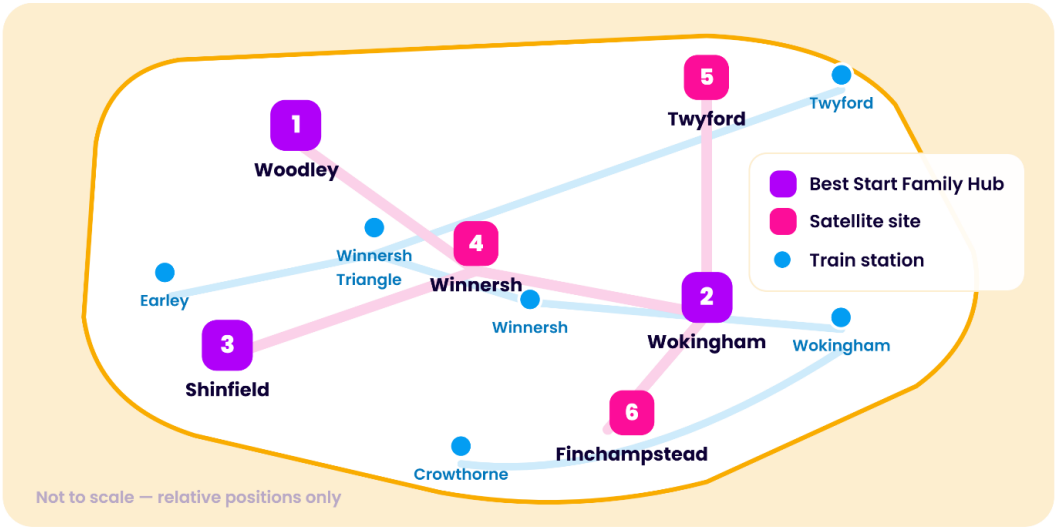
If needs become more complex, or there are worries about a child's safety, Family Hubs can help connect families to the Front Door for Families and our wider Family Help response.

BEST START IN LIFE | FAMILY HUBS

WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Your Family Hub is closer than you think

A welcoming place for the whole family, from pregnancy right through childhood and adolescence — support for families with children aged 0 to 19, and up to 25 for young people with SEND and care leavers.



1 Ambleside
Ambleside Close, Woodley RG5 4JJ
At The Ambleside Centre Nursery School

2 Brambles
Budges Gardens, Wokingham RG40 1PX
At The Foundry

3 Red Kite
Chestnut Crescent, Shinfield RG2 9EJ
In St Mary's Junior School grounds

4 Winnersh
Rainbow Park, Winnersh RG41 5SG
At Rainbow Community Centre

5 Starlings
Colleton Drive, Twyford RG10 0AX
On Colleton School site

6 Finchampstead
Gorse Ride North, Finchampstead RG40 4ES
At Finchampstead Baptist Centre

HOW YOUR HUB CAN HELP

Stay & play | Baby groups | Parent & carer support | Dads' groups | Infant feeding advice | SEND & additional needs | Perinatal mental health | Money & debt advice | Emotional wellbeing | Behaviour | Sleep & routines | School attendance | Birth registration (some sites)

The offer grows over time, shaped by what local families need. We also plan to have midwives in all our hubs, and we're developing a co-produced digital youth offer — a place for young people to find what's available.

Family Help Service

Family Help is for children and families with higher levels of need, more complex circumstances or changing needs who would benefit from coordinated support. In Wokingham, Family Help brings together targeted early help and child in need support into one joined-up service.

- **Targeted early help** supports children and families with multiple or complex needs where a plan and a lead practitioner are needed.
- A **child in need** is a child who needs extra help to be healthy, safe and able to grow and develop well. This may be because their wellbeing or development could be affected without support, because family circumstances are difficult, or because they have a disability.

Children and young people may need Family Help for many different reasons. This may include difficulties at home, worries about a child's wellbeing or development, parental mental health, child and adolescent mental health, young person's negative internet use, domestic abuse, substance misuse, physical ill health, learning needs, housing problems, money worries or overwhelming stress. Some children and families may need more coordinated support because they have additional needs or disabilities, and needs arising from their caring responsibilities Family Help works alongside the child, family and wider network to bring the right support together, build on strengths and prevent difficulties from becoming more serious.

All agencies supporting children should have an awareness of the support needs of children who have been previously Looked After. Kinship and Adoptive families can access Family Help where coordinated support is needed. Some adopted children or those living with family members or friends of their families, may experience emotional, social or developmental challenges linked to early life experiences, separation, trauma or loss.

Family Help can also support birth parents and children affected by parental imprisonment where this is impacting on the child or family's wellbeing.

Children with disabilities and their families can receive support through Family Hubs, wider Family Help or specialist services, depending on the child's needs. Targeted support may include help with short breaks, autism, behaviour and sleep. Details about available support and access routes can be found through the Local Offer.

Within Family Help, the Children with Disabilities Team provides specialist assessment, planning and support for children whose needs go beyond what can ordinarily be met through universal services, Family Hubs, targeted early help or wider Family Help pods. This is inclusive of children with severe or profound disabilities that have a substantial and long-term impact on daily life. Decisions about the right practitioner or team should be based on the child's needs and the level of specialist support required, not on diagnosis alone.

In Wokingham, the lead professional depends on the child and family's needs. Where support is provided as targeted early help, a Family Help Lead Practitioner will usually coordinate the plan with the family and partner agencies. Where a child is assessed as a child in need under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, a Social Worker will be the lead practitioner and will coordinate the child in need assessment, plan and reviews. As needs change, Family Help Lead Practitioners and Social Workers can step in and step back within the same Family Help pod, helping families experience continuity in relationships, assessment, planning and support without unnecessary transfers.

Pods and how we work with families in Wokingham

In Wokingham, Family Help support is provided through our Family Help and Care Pods and our Children with Disabilities team. Most children and families who need Family Help support will work with a pod. A pod is a team that includes a Pod Manager, Deputy Pod Manager, Social Workers, Family Help Lead Practitioners and Service Delivery Officers.

The pod that begins to work with a child and family from assessment will continue to work alongside children and families after the assessment, to ensure families do not have to keep telling their story to lots of different people. The aim is to build a relationship with families and stay involved until Family Help support is no longer needed. If there are exceptional circumstances and this is not possible, we will ensure we keep the child and family at the centre of how we work and discuss this before it happens.

Assessment and planning

If the Front Door for Families identifies that a family would benefit from Family Help, a practitioner from one of our Family Help pods will step alongside the child and family. The pod will stay involved for as long as coordinated support is needed.

- Family Help practitioners include Family Help Lead Practitioners and Social Workers. The pod works with the family to understand what is happening, what strengths are already there, what the worries are and what support may help things become safer and better.
- Working as a pod helps practitioners think together about the child's lived experience, share knowledge and agree the right support with the family.

Where a child has a disability, we work as one joined-up system to plan the right support. The Front Door and the Children with Disabilities Team work together early to understand the child's needs and agree the most appropriate pathway for assessment and support.

Support may be provided through a wider Family Help pod or through the Children with Disabilities Team, depending on the child's needs and the level of specialist input

required. Where a Family Help pod completes the assessment and provides ongoing support, the Children with Disabilities Team can offer advice and consultation so families experience a coordinated and seamless response.

Assessment is part of how we get to know the child and family and understand together what life is like day to day. It helps shape the plan and identify what support may make the biggest difference. Family Help practitioners work alongside children, parents, carers and, where helpful, wider family and naturally connected networks to explore what is going well, what is difficult and what needs to change. This includes understanding the child's lived experience, how they are growing, learning and experiencing the world, and the strengths, pressures and support already around the family. Where there are worries before a baby is born, assessment and planning should consider the unborn baby's safety, the parent or carer's needs, family strengths and networks, and what support is needed before and after birth.

Parent Carer Needs Assessments

If you have parental responsibility for a child under 18 with a disability, you can ask us for an assessment to see what support you might need. This is called a Parent Carer Needs Assessment (PCNA).

The aim is to:

- get an understanding of your situation and the vital role you play in your child's life
- find out what support would be most helpful to help you sustain your caring role long term

The legislation for a PCNA is part of the Children and Families Act 2014.

It is often combined with another assessment that is being carried out for your child's needs, but it can also take place on its own.

Request an assessment

You can ask us for a parent carer needs assessment by:

Phone: 0118 908 8002
Email: triage@wokingham.gov.uk

If your child has a Social Care Practitioner, you can also speak to them for advice about a PCNA.

Young Carers Needs Assessment

We know that when a child or young person helps to care for someone in their family, this can be a really important and valued role. It can also sometimes affect their

wellbeing, learning, friendships, confidence and opportunities to enjoy childhood. If it looks like a child may be a young carer and may need support, the local authority has a duty to offer a young carer's needs assessment. In Wokingham, this assessment is a conversation with the child and family about the caring role, how it affects everyday life, what is working well, and what support could make things easier. This may include looking at whether the caring responsibilities feel too much for the child, the impact on their health, development, education and wellbeing, the needs of the whole family, and what help would be most useful. Support could include young carers services, help through school, peer support and activities, short breaks, Family Hub support, Family Help or, where needed, statutory support.

Safety planning and the Child Protection process

Child Protection is the process used when professionals are seriously worried that a child has suffered and/or may be at risk of significant harm. Its purpose is to understand the worries clearly, protect the child from harm and make sure the child and family receive the right help to make things safer and better.

A Social Worker will usually speak with the child, parents and other people who know the family well to understand what is happening, what is working well, what the worries are and what needs to change. Other professionals, such as school or nursery staff, health workers or police, may also share information so there is a fuller picture of the child's lived experience and safety.

Where serious worries remain, an Initial Child Protection Conference may be held. This meeting brings together the family and professionals to agree what is going well, what the worries are and what needs to happen next. If a Child Protection Plan is needed, it will set out the changes required, who will do what, and how everyone will work together to help keep the child safe.

In Wokingham, children with Child Protection Plans remain within the same Family Help pod and will always have a Social Worker as the lead practitioner. This supports continuity in relationships, assessment, planning and support while safety planning is in place.

We are committed to keeping children safely within their families and naturally connected networks wherever this is possible. Safety planning should involve parents, wider family and people who are important to the child, building on the strengths and support already around them while being clear about what must change to keep the child safe.

More information about Child Protection Enquiries and Child Protection Conferences can be found via our Safeguarding Partnership procedure manual.

Abuse and Neglect

When this document uses words such as harm, abuse or neglect, it means situations where a child may be hurt, frightened, exploited, or is not receiving the care, protection and emotional security they need. These words can feel difficult, but using clear language helps families and professionals understand the worries and agree the right help and protection.

In Wokingham, experienced professionals work with families when there are worries that a child may be experiencing abuse or neglect. This may include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, female genital mutilation, forced marriage or so-called honour-based abuse. We seek to understand the child's day-to-day lived experience, including what life feels like at home and in their wider world, whether their needs are being met, and whether there are signs of fear, control, coercion, injury, trauma or unmet care.

If there are serious worries that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, a Social Worker will be involved. Child protection processes will be used to bring the right people together, assess risk, plan for safety and support the changes needed to help the child become safer.

As part of national reform, Wokingham is developing a Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) by March 2027. The MACPT will bring together experienced professionals from children's social care, police, health, education and other relevant partners so that children at risk of significant harm receive a timely, joined up and consistent response.

Risk of harm inside and outside the family home, including online harm

Children and young people can be harmed or placed at risk in many different places, including at home, in school, in their neighbourhood, through friendships or relationships, and online.

Harm outside the home can happen when someone pressures, threatens, controls, tricks or exploits a child. This may include sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, attempts to radicalise, harmful peer relationships, bullying, abuse in young people's relationships, grooming, coercion or online harm through social media, gaming or messaging apps.

In Wokingham, we want to understand the whole of a child's world, not only what is happening at home. This means paying attention to the people, places and online spaces that are part of a child's life, and working with families, schools, communities and partners to help make those spaces safer.

Examples of how harm occurs may include being pressured to carry drugs, money or weapons; being groomed for sexual exploitation; being threatened or controlled by

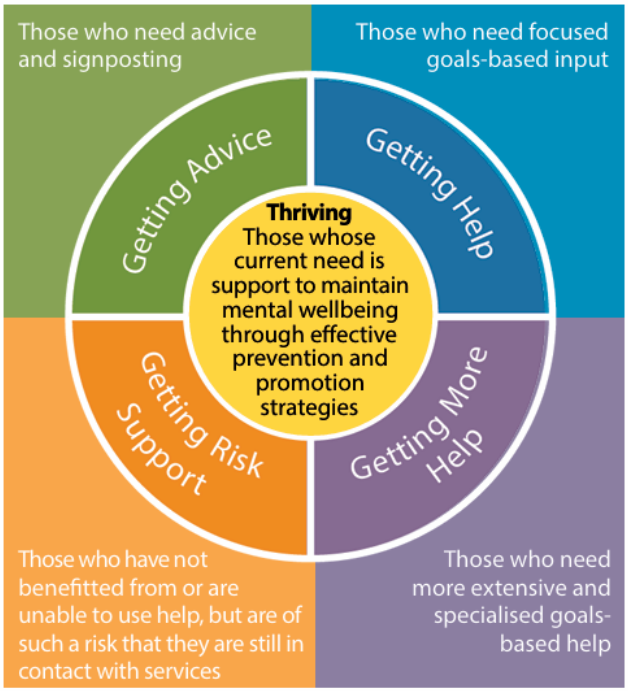
peers or older young people; being harmed in a relationship; or being manipulated or becoming fixated on harmful online content, to harm and abuse.

Family Hubs, Family Help and multi-agency partners work together when children and young people may be vulnerable to harm outside the home, including online. Support should be joined up around the child and family, building on strengths and protective relationships while responding clearly to risk. If there are serious worries that a child may not be safe, a Social Worker will be involved, and child protection processes may be used to bring family members and professionals together to make a clear safety plan.

Children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health needs

Children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health needs can be provided with support by universal, targeted and specialist services, depending on the level of need.

The THRIVE Framework conceptualises the mental health and wellbeing needs of children, young people and families into five needs-based groupings:



The THRIVE Framework depicted above reflects how schools, family help, community organisations, Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs), primary care and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) all have a role in supporting children and young people, with support increasing or reducing in line with changing needs.

We work together to provide graduated support, ensuring children receive the right help at the right time. Wokingham has adopted the THRIVE Framework, based on key principles. Support is needs led rather than based on diagnosis or severity. We believe support for children and their wellbeing is everyone's responsibility and that children should be able to move between levels of support as needs change.

Youth Justice

Wokingham Prevention and Youth Justice Service

Wokingham's Prevention and Youth Justice Service is a crime and prevention service that works with children and young people aged 10 to 17 at risk of offending or that have offended. The service has a strong prevention and diversion focus and works with children under statutory orders alongside a wider partnership offer. It aims to identify worries early and offer the right help before problems become more serious, or before a child enters the formal youth justice system, wherever this is possible and safe.

Support includes direct intervention with children, assessment and planning, addressing safety, strengthening relationships, building on emotional wellbeing, helping children connect with positive activities, community integration and the delivery of a victim offer. The aim is to strengthen belonging, reduce harm and support children to make safe and positive choices.

The Prevention and Youth Justice Service works alongside Family Hubs and Family Help so that children, young people and families experience one joined-up response. Family Hubs help identify early worries and provide community-based support. Family Help coordinate more targeted multi-agency support where needs are greater or more complex. The Prevention and Youth Justice Service brings specialist knowledge on offending, prevention, diversion, safety, exploitation and resettlement.

Together, these services work to support young people and families, involve wider family and connected networks, and help children get the right support at the earliest opportunity.

Contact Details: Prevention and Youth Justice Service

Address: The Court House, Erfstadt Court, Wokingham, Berkshire**,** RG40 2YF

Telephone: 01189 746 900; **E-mail** yos@wokingham.gov.uk

When children need care, protection or legal planning

Public Law Outline (PLO), Pre-Proceedings and Care proceedings

The Public Law Outline, (often called PLO), is the process the local authority follows when there are very serious worries about a child's safety, and the current plan is not

making the child safe enough. It is used when the local authority is considering whether it may need to ask the Court to make an Order to protect the child.

Pre-proceedings is the stage before any Court application is made. The aim is to avoid going to Court wherever it is safe to do so. Families need a clear understanding of what the worries are, know what needs to change, have access to legal advice, and receive the right help and support to make those changes.

A Family Group Conference will be offered wherever possible to families where needs are escalating, and the local authority is considering making an application to the Court to help make a child safe.

A Family Group Conference is a meeting that helps parents, wider family members and other important people in the child's life come together to make a plan for the child's safety, care and wellbeing. The aim is to identify family-led solutions and support networks that can help keep the child safe in the short and long term.

Care Proceedings is the legal process used when there are very serious worries about a child's safety or wellbeing and the local authority believes the Court may need to make decisions to protect the child. Wherever possible, work with the family and wider network will continue so that the child's relationships, identity and long-term needs remain central to planning.

Kinship care

Kinship care is when a child is cared for by a relative, family friend or another person who already has a meaningful connection with them, because their parents are not able to care for them. This may be an informal family arrangement, a Private Fostering arrangement, or a legal arrangement such as a Child Arrangements Order, Special Guardianship Order or connected person foster care arrangement.

Private Fostering is when a child under 16, or under 18 if they are disabled, is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a close relative for 28 days or more, where the arrangement has been made privately. Close relatives include grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and step parents by marriage or civil partnership. The Council must be told about Private Fostering arrangements so that the child's welfare can be checked and support can be offered where needed.

Kinship care matters because it can help children stay with people they know and trust, maintain relationships, identity, culture and belonging, and reduce the trauma that can come from separation. In Wokingham, we want family and friends' networks to be considered as early as possible whenever a child may not be able to live safely with their parents.

The Council has duties in some kinship arrangements, and always in Private Fostering arrangements, to understand whether the child is safe and well cared for and whether

the carer can meet the child's needs. What the Council must do will depend on the child's circumstances and the type of arrangement in place. Support may include information and advice, practical help, emotional or therapeutic support, training, support groups and, where appropriate, financial support.

Wokingham has a Kinship Local Offer so that kinship families can more easily understand what support is available, how to access it and who to contact. We expect services across the Council and our partners to work together so that kinship carers and the children they care for can access the right help with education, health, housing, emotional wellbeing, family support and wider community connections.

Children we Care for

Children may become children we care for for different reasons. This may happen when it is not safe for them to remain at home, when their parents are unable to care for them for a period of time, or when they need to live somewhere else while longer-term plans are made. Some children are cared for under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, where the local authority provides accommodation with the agreement of those who hold parental responsibility. Other children become children we care for through a court order, such as an Interim Care Order or Care Order, where the local authority shares parental responsibility and must make decisions in the child's best interests.

When a child becomes a child we care for, the whole council and relevant public bodies (i.e. health, police, education services etc) share responsibility for being good corporate parents. This means working together as any good parent would: keeping children safe, supporting their health, education, identity and relationships, listening to their wishes and feelings, and helping them to belong, enjoy life, achieve and prepare for adulthood.

Every child we care for in Wokingham has an allocated Social Worker in the Family Help Service and an Independent Reviewing Officer. Their care plan should be built around their needs, relationships, identity, stability and future, with the child's voice and lived experience at the centre.

Children may live with family members or people who are naturally connected to them through kinship care, with foster carers, in children's homes, in integrated provision such as specialist schools, or, for some older young people, in supported accommodation. Wherever a child lives, planning should promote safety, stability, belonging and lasting relationships.

Secure Estate

Any child who is remanded or sentenced to the secure estate remains a child first. Their safeguarding, welfare, family relationships, education, health and return to the community must stay at the centre of planning. Decisions should be child-centred,

trauma-informed and proportionate. Secure remand should only be used where the legal threshold is met and there is no safe community alternative.

Where a child is remanded to Youth Detention Accommodation, they become a child we care for, for the duration of the remand. Wokingham will work promptly with Family Help and Care, the Prevention and Youth Justice Service, education, health, the secure setting and relevant partners to make sure the child's safeguarding needs, family contact, emotional wellbeing and resettlement planning are understood and supported.

Remand to custody should always be considered as a last resort. Practitioners should consider whether risk can be safely managed in the community through robust bail support, family network options, local authority foster care or other local arrangements. Where custody is necessary, statutory visiting and review arrangements must be met, information should be shared appropriately, and planning should not drift.

Where a child is sentenced to the secure estate, support should remain active and supportive throughout the sentence. The child should have one joined-up plan that brings together the secure setting, Prevention and Youth Justice, Children's Social Care, education, health and family members. Planning should focus on safety and statutory duties, and also on the child's strengths, relationships, identity, learning, health and preparation for release.

Resettlement planning should begin at the start of the sentence, not at the point of release. It should address accommodation, education, training or employment, health, emotional wellbeing, substance misuse support, family and community connections, and any risks linked to exploitation, offending or harm outside the home.

Children in the secure estate should be considered through the same safeguarding lens as any child with complex needs, while recognising the additional impact custody can have on development, trust, education and mental health. Decisions should take account of the child's lived experience, trauma, neurodiversity, exploitation, family stress, homelessness, substance misuse, unmet health needs and protective relationships.

On release, support should be stepped up rather than stepped down where the child remains vulnerable. Transitions back into home, education, training, work or community provision should be actively coordinated to reduce the risk of reoffending, placement breakdown or further harm.

The Wokingham Remand Custody and Resettlement and Case Management Guidance 2026 sets out detailed service policy and case management guidance for working with children who are remanded or sentenced to custody and supporting their resettlement into the community.

Working together safely

Information sharing

No single practitioner can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances, so effective information sharing between practitioners, local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision to keep children safe. *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026* is clear that practitioners should be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children. This may be when problems are first emerging, such as persistent school absence, going missing, or receiving unexplained gifts or new possessions, or where a child is already known to Wokingham Children's Services. Sharing relevant information about adults who have contact with the child may also be important where this could affect the child's safety or welfare.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 introduced an Information Sharing Duty to provide clarity for practitioners on what and when they should share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Effective information sharing is essential to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Without it, practitioners cannot build a full understanding of a child's circumstances, identify need or concerns before they escalate, or decide what action is needed to keep them safe or promote their welfare, including where they may pose a risk to other children. Information sharing also helps organisation to holistically assess if a child poses a risk to other children. The complexity of legislation can leave practitioners feeling unsure about when they can share information, particularly where concerns relate to a child's welfare or emerging need, rather than harm. This has led to confusion about whether a specific statutory threshold – such as child protection enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 – must be met before information can be shared. To address this the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act amended the Children Act 2004 to make clear that there is no requirement for a child to meet a particular statutory threshold before information can be shared. Under the information sharing duty, information must be shared where it is relevant to safeguarding and promoting a child's welfare, including where concerns relate to early help, prevention and unmet need.

The information sharing duty does not replace existing safeguarding procedures. Instead, it makes clear that legislation supports the sharing of information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. This means when practitioners share information, they can now do so with confidence, even where practitioners may have previously been concerned that statutory or local thresholds were not met. When a practitioner has information to share, the type of information will

determine how it should be shared – for example, whether it should be passed on as a referral. The obligation to share under the information sharing duty, as set out below, applies to scenarios that arise after its commencement in September 2026. Organisations are not required to retrospectively apply the duty to decisions on whether to share information that predates commencement but may choose to do so where need is identified, or there are ongoing concerns that have not previously been shared.

Trusting relationships are at the heart of working with children and families. Where possible and safe to do so, transparency and honesty is important, and it is best practice to inform children and parents where information has been shared. However, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of a child must always be the paramount concern. The information sharing duty does not apply in extremely limited circumstances where a practitioner, acting on behalf of their organisation, determine through professional judgement that sharing information would be more detrimental to the child than not sharing. Any decision not to share in order to avoid greater detriment to the child should be rare, and carefully considered, with the welfare of the child central to the judgement.

If practitioners are unsure, they should seek advice from their manager, safeguarding lead or local procedures so that any barriers are swiftly addressed, ensuring the child's welfare remains at the heart of any decisions.

Note that this guidance should be read alongside, and does not replace the following:

- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 and any subsequent iteration
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 and any subsequent iteration – the statutory safeguarding guidance for all schools and colleges.
- Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework.
- Other sector-specific safeguarding guidance (e.g. health, policing, prisons, probation and youth justice).
- The Data sharing code of practice produced by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), and other ICO guidance on sharing information for the purposes of safeguarding.
- Professional standards and codes of practice.

Working through differences of opinion or things that don't feel right

Sometimes families, practitioners or agencies may have different views about the help a child needs, the level of worry, or what should happen next. These differences should be discussed early, respectfully and openly, with the child's safety, wellbeing and lived experience at the centre. Different perspectives can be helpful when they encourage curiosity, constructive challenge and a fuller understanding of what life is like for the child and family.

If families disagree with a decision, feel the help offered is not right, or feel they have not been listened to or treated properly, we want to understand this and try to resolve it as early as possible. Families can speak with the practitioner they know, ask to speak with their manager, or use the organisation's complaints or feedback process. Families should be given a clear explanation of decisions and know what they can do next if they remain worried.

If practitioners or agencies cannot resolve concerns together, they should speak with their managers and use the local professional disagreement or escalation procedures without delay. The aim is to reach clarity, make safe decisions and get the right help in place.

Working together and safeguarding partnership arrangements

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Children, families and professionals should work together in a joined-up way so that children get the right help at the right time.

This means listening to children and families, sharing information appropriately, being clear about who is doing what, and making sure support feels coordinated rather than confusing or repetitive.

Local safeguarding partnership arrangements bring together the organisations that share responsibility for keeping children safe, including the council, police, health, education settings and other partners. These arrangements help agencies work together, learn from practice, respond to risk and improve support for children and families.

At present, safeguarding partnership arrangements are delivered through the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership. By October 2026, these arrangements will transition to the Wokingham Safeguarding Partnership so that local safeguarding work is more closely matched to Wokingham's needs, services, learning and priorities.

During this transition, local safeguarding procedures remain available through the Pan Berkshire procedures manual.

Allegations management

Concerns about an adult who works or volunteers with children must be referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer, known as the LADO. This applies where there is information that a person who works with children, including a volunteer, may have:

- harmed a child, or may have harmed a child
- committed, or may have committed, an offence against a child
- behaved in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children
- behaved in a way that indicates they may be unsuitable to work with children.

The LADO is responsible for managing allegations against adults who work with children. The LADO will advise on what should happen next and how the concern should be managed. Children's social care remains responsible for any safeguarding response needed for the child, and other agencies may need to take action in line with their own responsibilities.

The LADO can be contacted by email at LADO@wokingham.gov.uk.

Further information and local services

Family Hubs and additional service information

Wokingham Directory and Family Hubs

The Wokingham Directory helps families and professionals find local childcare, activities, SEND information, services and support in one place.

The Wokingham Directory can be found here: Children and Families.

All Wokingham's children's centres are becoming Best Start Family Hubs by November 2026. There will be three main hubs and three network sites offering support for families with children aged 0 to 19, and up to 25 for young people with SEND. With a specific care leavers Hub being implemented in Autumn 2026.

Family Hubs are home to the Best Start in Life offer. Services will continue to grow as the local offer develops.

Details about Wokingham's Family Hubs offer can be found here: Children's Centres and Best Start Family Hubs.

SEND Local Offer

Wokingham's SEND Local Offer provides information about support for children and young people aged 0 to 25 with special educational needs and disabilities, and their families. It brings together information about education, health, social care, activities and wider support. It can be accessed here: Local offer for 0–25-year-olds with additional needs.

CAN (children with additional needs) Network

The CAN Network is Wokingham Borough Council's information and support service for families and carers of children and young people up to age 25 with additional needs and disabilities.

The CAN Network also maintains the Children with Disabilities Register and CAN Card. More information is available here:

Wokingham Directory | CAN (children with additional needs) Network and CAN Card

Short breaks and respite services

Short breaks are activities and support for children with disabilities, young people and their families. They can give children opportunities to take part in positive activities and give families time to rest or manage caring responsibilities. More information about Wokingham's short breaks offer can be found here: Short breaks explained.

Holiday, activities, and food programme

HAF provides free activities with a healthy meal to children and young people in school years from Reception to Year 11 who are in receipt of benefit-related free school meals (or who have been referred by a professional who works with their family) during the main school holidays of Easter, Summer and Christmas. HAF Programme explained.

Health and wellbeing for children and young people

A range of services to help with health and well-being needs from sexual health services, relationships and mental health and emotional wellbeing can be found here.

Youth services and local youth clubs

Some local youth services can be found here - Youth services

Local youth clubs offer safe, welcoming spaces to hang out, try new activities, and meet friends. Many are run by charities or Parish Councils. To find a youth club, visit the community directory.

Wokingham Here4YOUth - Wokingham Here4YOUth is an alcohol and drug service for anyone up to the age of 18 living in Wokingham

Useful links and contact details

This section brings together key links and contact details for families and practitioners.

- **Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (moving to Wokingham Safeguarding Partnership)**
- **Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership** Multi-Agency Referral Form
- **Pan Berkshire Child Protection Procedures**
- **Wokingham Children Services Procedures Manual**
- Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO): LADO@wokingham.gov.uk
- **NSPCC website**

- Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding: **Contextual Safeguarding Network**

- **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026**

- Wokingham Front Door contact details:
  Telephone: 0118 908 8002
  Email: triage@wokingham.gov.uk

- Out of Hours Emergency Duty Service: contact the Emergency Duty Service for urgent safeguarding concerns outside normal office hours, including between 5pm and 9am Monday to Friday, weekends and bank holidays. Telephone: 01344 351999.

- **Wokingham Local Offer**: information about local services, support, activities and events for children and young people aged 0 to 25 with special educational needs or disabilities.

- **Family Information Service**

Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
BWSCP	Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership
CAMHS	Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FIS	Family Information Service
GP	General Practitioner
LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer
LSCB	Local Safeguarding Children Board (replaced locally by the BWSCP)
MARF	Multi-Agency Referral Form
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
SEND	Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities
YOS	Youth Offending Service

Appendix 1. Quick guide to responses to need

How to read this quick guide

This appendix gives examples of need and possible responses. It is intended to support professional judgement and shared conversations. It is not a checklist or a set of fixed thresholds. Children and families' circumstances can change quickly, and practitioners should always consider the child's lived experience, family strengths, protective factors, worries, risk and what help is most likely to make a difference. This includes unborn babies where there are worries before birth.

Examples of need and possible responses

Area of need	Universal services / Family Hubs	Family Help	Statutory safeguarding and safety planning
Pregnancy, unborn babies and early infancy	Midwifery, health visiting, Family Hub support, infant feeding advice, emotional wellbeing support, parenting preparation and help to connect with local services.	Coordinated pre-birth or early help support where there are worries about parental mental health, domestic abuse, substance misuse, housing, family stress, previous care experience or support networks.	Serious worries that an unborn baby may be at risk of significant harm after birth, including serious domestic abuse, untreated substance misuse, unsafe care, concealed pregnancy, previous significant harm to a child, or concerns requiring pre-birth child protection planning.
Child development, health and emotional wellbeing and mental health	Advice, guidance or community support where needs are emerging, such as sleep, routines, behaviour, emotional wellbeing, infant feeding, school readiness or general health advice. Both those with mild or temporary	Coordinated support where worries are persistent, escalating or affecting the child's development, health, education or emotional wellbeing, and more than one service may need to	Immediate or serious concerns about safety, significant self-harm, serious mental health crisis, unexplained injury, harmful sexual behaviour, fabricated or induced illness, or unmet health needs causing or likely to cause significant harm.

	difficulties those with fluctuating or ongoing severe difficulties, who are managing their own mental health and not wanting goals-based specialist input response includes, school counselling service, Mental Health Support Team (MHST) in schools, groups/ workshops, talking therapies, CAMHS (THRIVE framework).	work with the family. Those who need specific interventions focused on agreed mental health outcomes and those who need extensive support including CAMHS, Mental Health Support Team (MHST) in schools, workshops for parents, talking therapies (THRIVE framework).	Those who need more extensive and specialised mental health help. Unable to benefit from evidence-based mental health treatment but remain a significant concern and risk. Overlapping & co-existing needs, ASD, major trauma, broken attachments, emerging personality disorders, not yet responded to interventions. Response can include CAMHS, change of provision, work with wider system to maintain educational and home placement, bespoke mental health response (THRIVE framework).
Parenting, family relationships and home	Parenting advice, family activities, relationship support, routines, housing or money advice, and help to connect response (services and support networks.	Coordinated support where family stress, parental mental health, domestic abuse, substance misuse, disability, poverty, housing instability or relationship difficulties are affecting the child's wellbeing.	Serious neglect, unsafe care, domestic abuse presenting significant risk, physical harm, emotional harm, abandonment, or situations where the child cannot be kept safe without a statutory safeguarding response.
SEND, Education, attendance and inclusion	Support through education settings, attendance advice, SEND advice, Family Hub support, the SEND Local Offer,	Support where attendance, exclusion, SEND, behaviour, social, emotional, mental health & wellbeing	Child missing education with safeguarding concerns, persistent absence linked to neglect or exploitation,

	early years support or community activities where worries are early or low level.	or family pressures are having a significant impact and a coordinated plan is needed.	serious risk of harm in or around school, or no suitable education alongside wider safeguarding concerns.
Disability and additional needs	Information, advice and support through Family Hubs, the SEND Local Offer, the CAN Network and Disability Register, education settings, health services, voluntary and community services and groups and direct access short breaks.	Coordinated assessment and support where needs are more complex, family pressures are increasing, including support via Family Help or the Short Breaks Team or where specialist advice is required from the Children with Disabilities Team.	Safeguarding concerns about a child with a disability, including neglect and/unmet care needs causing significant harm, serious risk or injury linked to the child's disability, behaviour and communication needs or dependency on others.
Harm outside the home, exploitation and online harm	Advice about friendships, online safety, bullying, relationships, community activities and trusted adults where worries are emerging.	Coordinated support where a child is vulnerable to exploitation, harmful peer relationships, going missing, online manipulation, risky relationships or offending, but risk can be managed through a joined-up plan.	Suspected or known sexual or criminal exploitation, serious online harm, coercion, trafficking, threats, weapons, repeated missing episodes, or risk of significant harm in the community or online.
Young people, offending and risk-taking behaviour	Early advice, positive activities, youth support, school or community-based support where concerns are emerging and the	Prevention and diversion support where offending, anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, exploitation risk, education breakdown or	Serious offending linked to harm, exploitation, weapons, serious violence, remand or custody, or situations where the young person or others

	young person is willing to engage.	family conflict requires coordinated help.	may be at significant risk of harm.

Referral guidance

For guidance on making a good referral, see the *How to get help* section earlier in this document.