

Types of abuse and children that are potentially at risk of greater harm

Abuse, neglect & exploitation

For consistency across this policy suite, the term abuse, neglect and exploitation should be used when referring to safeguarding concerns collectively. This reflects current safeguarding terminology and ensures that exploitation is considered alongside abuse and neglect throughout related policies, procedures and staff guidance.

Recognising abuse, neglect & exploitation

Child abuse, neglect and exploitation can affect children of any sex and age, in all cultures, religions and social classes, and children with and without disabilities. All staff and volunteers should be alert to signs that a child may be at risk of harm, including abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Abuse

Abuse is a form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse, neglect or exploit a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be harmed in a family, institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse, neglect and exploitation can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline harm. Children may be harmed by an adult or adults, or by another child or children.

Child on child abuse

Child-on-child abuse is most likely to include, but may not be limited to:

- bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying)
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between children (sometimes known as 'teenage relationship abuse')
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages physical abuse)
- sexual violence, such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault; this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages sexual violence. Consensual sharing of nude or semi-nude images, especially between older children of the same age, may require a different safeguarding and educational response. It may not be abusive in every case, but children still need to understand the law and the risks. Non-consensual sharing is illegal and abusive. UKCIS provides detailed advice about the sharing of nudes and semi-nude images and videos.
- sexual harassment, such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be standalone or part of a broader pattern of abuse
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party
- consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos, including images or videos that have been digitally altered, manipulated or wholly generated using artificial intelligence.
- upskirting, which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without their permission, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress, or alarm, and
- initiation/hazing type violence and rituals (this could include activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element).

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse can encompass a wide range of behaviours and may be a single incident or a pattern of incidents. That abuse can be, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional. Children can be victims of domestic abuse. They may see, hear, or experience the effects of abuse at home and/or suffer domestic abuse in their own intimate relationships (teenage relationship abuse). All of which can have a detrimental and long-term impact on their health, well-being, development, and ability to learn.

Physical abuse

This may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child.

Emotional Abuse

Is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's development capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another. It may

involve serious bullying, including cyber-bullying, causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment to a child, though it may occur alone.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration, such as rape or oral sex, or non-penetrative acts such as kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Child Sexual Exploitation

Is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if their sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)

Children's sexual behaviour exists on a wide continuum, ranging from normal and developmentally expected to inappropriate, problematic, abusive and violent. Problematic, abusive and violent sexual behaviour is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage. Harmful sexual behaviour can occur online and/or face-to-face and can also occur simultaneously between the two. It should always be considered within a safeguarding and child protection context. When considering harmful sexual behaviour, the ages and stages of development of the children involved are critical factors. Sexual behaviour between children can be considered harmful if one child is much older, particularly if there is more than two years' difference or if one child is pre-pubescent and the other is not. However, a younger child can abuse an older child, particularly where there is a power imbalance, for example where the older child is disabled or smaller in stature. Dedham Therapy Farm recognises that children who display harmful sexual behaviour may have experienced abuse or trauma themselves.

Children who have experienced sexual violence may display a wide range of responses, including clear signs of trauma, physical or emotional responses, changes in behaviour, or no overt signs at all. Dedham Therapy Farm remains alert to the challenges of identifying these signs and will respond sensitively to the needs of the child, irrespective of how visible their distress appears.

Female Genital Mutilation

FGM comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs. It is illegal in the UK

and a form of child abuse with long-lasting harmful consequences.

- A relative or someone known as a 'cutter' visiting from abroad.
- A special occasion or ceremony takes place where a girl 'becomes a woman' or is 'prepared for marriage'.
- A female relative, like a mother, sister or aunt has undergone FGM.
- A family arranges a long holiday overseas or visits a family abroad during the summer holidays.
- A girl has an unexpected or long absence from school or sessions.
- A girl struggles to keep up in school.
- A girl runs away – or plans to run away - from home.
- Having difficulty walking, standing or sitting.
- Spending longer in the bathroom or toilet.
- Appearing quiet, anxious or depressed.
- Acting differently after an absence from school, college or farm sessions.
- Reluctance to go to the doctors or have routine medical examinations.
- Asking for help – though they might not be explicit about the problem because they're scared or embarrassed

If staff have concerns regarding FGM, safeguarding procedures must be followed and details must be reported immediately to the DSL. The DSL will consider referral to Children's Social Care and/or the Police, including any mandatory reporting duties that apply.

Forced Marriage

When it comes to the marriage of an adult, a forced marriage is not the same as an arranged marriage. There are clear distinctions between them. In an arranged marriage, the families of both spouses take a leading role in the arrangements, but the choice of whether to go ahead with the marriage remains the decision of the prospective spouses. However, in a forced marriage, one or both spouses do not consent to the marriage but are coerced into it. An arranged marriage can, however, become a forced marriage if there is any form of coercion. Forcing someone to marry against their will can include in some cases physical violence and/or psychological, financial, sexual and emotional pressure. In cases of vulnerable adults who lack the capacity to consent, coercion is not required for a marriage to be forced.

When it comes to the marriage of a child, the distinction between a forced marriage and an arranged marriage does not exist. Following legislation which came into force on 27 February 2023, it is an offence to engage in any conduct for the purpose of causing a child to marry before their eighteenth birthday, even if violence, threats or another form of coercion are not used. Such a marriage is deemed a forced marriage.

Forced marriage can happen to both women and men, although many of the reported cases involve young women and girls aged between 16 and 25. There is no "typical" victim of forced marriage. They can be over or under 18 years of age, some may have a disability, some may have young children and some may also be spouses from overseas.

Neglect

The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food and clothing
- shelter including exclusion from home or abandonment
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Radicalisation is the process of a person legitimising support for, or use of, terrorist violence. **Terrorism** is an action that endangers or causes serious violence to a person/people; causes serious damage to property; or seriously interferes or disrupts an electronic system. The use or threat must be designed to influence the government or to intimidate

the public and is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause. Although there is no single way of identifying whether a child is likely to be susceptible to radicalisation into terrorism, there are factors that may indicate concern. It is possible to protect people from extremist ideology and intervene to prevent those at risk of radicalisation being drawn to terrorism. As with other safeguarding risks, staff should be alert to changes in children's behaviour, which could indicate that they may be in need of help or protection. Staff should use their judgement in identifying children who might be at risk of radicalisation and act proportionately which may include the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) making a Prevent referral.

Children may be susceptible to radicalisation into terrorism. Similar to protecting children from other forms of harms and abuse, protecting children from this risk should be a part of the settings safeguarding approach. Extremism is the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. This also includes calling for the death of members of the armed forces.

Children potentially at risk of greater harm

We recognise that some children may be at risk of greater harm from abuse, neglect or exploitation and may require additional help and support. These may include;

- children who are lesbian, gay or bisexual
- children who are questioning their gender
- children with a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan,
- have been excluded from school
- have special educational needs
- are disabled
- are in care
- are leaving or preparing to leave care
- are young carers
- children in kinship care
- children with a parent or carer in custody, or affected by parental offending;
- children experiencing housing instability or homelessness.
- are young parents (or about to become young parents) are experiencing housing issues
- children Missing Education (CME)
- absent from education
- children requiring mental health support
- children at risk of exploitation or serious violence.

We work with Children's Social Care and other appropriate agencies to ensure there is a joined-up approach to planning for these children and that they receive the right help at the right time.

Our setting understands that children with special educational needs, disabilities or certain health conditions can face additional safeguarding challenges, both online and offline. Barriers can exist when recognising abuse, neglect and exploitation in this group of children. These can include:

- Assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the child's disability, without further exploration
- That they may be more prone to peer group isolation than others

The potential to be disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying, including prejudice-based bullying, without outwardly showing signs

- Communication difficulties in overcoming these barriers

Children who may benefit from Family Help intervention

Signs that a child or young person may benefit from Family Help or may require a referral for statutory support because of concerns about abuse, neglect or exploitation include:

- displaying disruptive or anti-social behaviour
- being bullied or bullying others
- having poor attendance
- being involved in, or at risk of, offending
- having poor general health
- having anxiety, depression or other mental health issues
- misusing drugs or alcohol
- having a particularly challenging relationship with parents or appearing to be unusually independent from their parents
- experiencing difficulties at home, such as domestic abuse, parental substance abuse or parental mental health problems
- Is disabled or has certain health conditions and has specific additional needs
- Has special educational needs (whether or not they have a statutory Education, Health and Care plan)
- has a mental health need
- is a young carer
- is showing signs of being drawn in to anti-social or criminal behaviour, including gang involvement and association with organised crime groups or county lines
 - is frequently absent from education, missing from education, home or care
 - has persistent and/or unexplained absences from education
- has experienced multiple suspensions, is at risk of being permanently excluded from schools, colleges and in Alternative Provision or a Pupil Referral Unit.
- is at risk of modern slavery, trafficking, sexual and/or criminal exploitation
- is at risk of being radicalised or exploited
- has a parent or carer in custody, or is affected by parental offending
- is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as drug and alcohol misuse, adult mental health issues and domestic abuse
- is misusing alcohol and other drugs themselves
- is at risk of so-called 'honour'-based abuse such as Female Genital Mutilation or Forced Marriage
- is a privately fostered child.

Some groups of children may be more likely to need Family Help than their peers. These include children who:

- have been excluded from school
- have special educational needs

- are disabled
- are in care
- are leaving or preparing to leave care
- are young carers,
- are young parents or are about to become young parents,
- or are experiencing housing issues
- Children who are lesbian, gay or bisexual
- Children who are questioning their gender
- Children Missing Education (CME)
- are absent from education, particularly on repeat occasions and/or for prolonged periods

Where concerns are being managed within the setting, Dedham Therapy Farm may decide that the children involved do not require referral to statutory services but may benefit from Family Help. Family Help is support for children of all ages that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse. Providing Family Help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Family Help can be particularly useful to address non-violent harmful sexual behaviour and may prevent escalation into sexual violence. It is particularly important that the designated safeguarding lead and deputies know the local Family Help process, thresholds and referral pathways.

Criminal Court

Children are sometimes required to give evidence in criminal courts, either for crimes committed against them or for crimes they have witnessed. There are two age appropriate guides to support children 5-11-year olds and 12-17 year olds. The guides explain each step of the process, support and special measures that are available. There are diagrams illustrating the courtroom structure and the use of video links is explained. Making child arrangements via the family courts following separation can be stressful and entrench conflict in families. This can be stressful for children. The Ministry of Justice has launched an online child arrangements information tool with clear and concise information on the dispute resolution service. This may be useful for some parents and carers

Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), or certain medical or physical health conditions, can face additional safeguarding challenges both online and offline. Dedham Therapy Farm recognises that additional barriers can exist when recognising abuse, neglect and exploitation in this group of children. These can include:

- assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the child's condition without further exploration
- these children being more prone to peer group isolation or bullying (including prejudice-based bullying) than other children
- the potential for children with SEND or certain medical conditions being disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying, without outwardly showing any signs, and
- communication barriers and difficulties in managing or reporting these challenges.
- cognitive understanding – being unable to understand the difference between fact and fiction in online content and then repeating the content/behaviours in sessions or the consequences of doing so.

LGBT+ and children who are questioning their gender

The fact that a child or young person may be LGBT+ is not in itself an inherent risk factor for harm. However, children who are LGBT+ can be targeted by other children. In some cases, a child who is perceived by other children to be LGBT+, whether they are or not, can be just as vulnerable as children who identify as LGBT+.

However, the Cass review identified that caution is necessary for children questioning their gender as there remain many unknowns about the impact of social transition and children may well have wider vulnerabilities, including having complex mental health and psychosocial needs, and in some cases additional diagnoses of autism and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

It is recommended that when families/carers are making decisions about support for gender questioning children, they should be encouraged to seek clinical help and advice. When parents are supporting pre-pubertal children, clinical services should ensure that they can be seen as early as possible by a clinical professional with relevant experience.

When supporting a child who is questioning their gender, the setting will take a cautious and child-centred approach, considering the broad range of the child's individual needs in partnership with parents or carers, other than in the exceptionally rare circumstances where involving parents or carers would constitute a significant risk of harm to the child. The setting will consider any clinical advice that is available and how best to address wider vulnerabilities, including the risk of bullying. The setting will refer to relevant government guidance for schools and colleges in relation to children who are questioning their gender when deciding how to proceed.

Risks can be compounded where children who are LGBT+ lack a trusted adult with whom they can be open. It is therefore vital that staff endeavour to reduce the additional barriers faced and find a safe space for them to speak out or share their concerns with members of staff they trust. Additional safeguarding vulnerability may arise through bullying, abuse, isolation, discrimination or lack of a trusted adult.

Children Missing Education (CME)

Children Missing Education (CME) are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. Children missing education are at significant risk of underachieving and may be at increased risk of harm, exploitation, radicalisation or becoming NEET later in life. Staff should be aware that being absent from education, particularly on repeat occasions and/or for prolonged periods, can be a warning sign of a range of safeguarding concerns, including abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation and other harm.

Violence against women and girls;

Violence against women and girls is a safeguarding concern which can include a range of harmful attitudes, behaviours and forms of abuse, including domestic abuse, sexual harassment, sexual violence, coercive control, stalking and online abuse. Dedham Therapy Farm recognises that these behaviours can begin during childhood and should never be dismissed as "banter" or "part of growing up". Staff should be alert to indicators that a child may be experiencing, witnessing, perpetrating or being influenced by such behaviour, and should respond in line with safeguarding procedures.

Misogyny and sexist abuse;

Misogyny and sexist abuse may include language, behaviour, online content, humiliation, harassment, intimidation or harmful stereotypes which target, demean or control others because of sex or perceived gender. Staff should recognise that misogynistic attitudes and sexist abuse can create an unsafe culture and may escalate into harmful sexual behaviour, sexual harassment or sexual violence if not challenged early. Concerns must be recorded, reported and addressed proportionately through safeguarding and behaviour procedures.

Serious violence;

Serious violence may include children being involved in, exposed to, or at risk from violent crime, threats, assaults, gang-related activity, exploitation or harm within the community. Indicators may include unexplained injuries, changes in behaviour, increased absence, carrying or associating with weapons, fearfulness, or having older peers exerting influence or control. Staff should remain alert to contextual safeguarding factors and share concerns promptly with the DSL so that appropriate support, risk assessment and referrals can be considered.

Weapon-related concerns;

Weapon-related concerns include any information, disclosure, behaviour or indication that a child may be carrying, accessing, threatened by, using, storing or being encouraged to carry a weapon. This may include knives, other offensive weapons, improvised weapons or online content which promotes weapon carrying or violence. Any concern involving a weapon must be treated seriously, reported immediately to the DSL and managed in line with safeguarding, behaviour and emergency procedures, including contacting the police where there is an immediate risk of harm.

Child criminal exploitation and county lines;

Child criminal exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child into criminal activity. This can include county lines, where children are exploited to move, store or sell drugs or money across areas, often through threats, violence, debt, grooming or the offer of status, protection, money or gifts. Children may appear to consent to the activity, but this does not reduce the seriousness of the exploitation. Staff should be alert to changes in behaviour, unexplained money or possessions, missing episodes, new peer groups or travel patterns, and report concerns to the DSL without delay.

Modern slavery and trafficking;

Modern slavery and trafficking involve the recruitment, movement, harbouring or control of children for the purpose of exploitation. This may include criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude or other forms of abuse. Children may be moved within the UK or across borders and may be controlled through threats, violence, debt, fear, isolation or dependency. Staff should be alert to indicators such as unexplained travel, limited freedom, fear of adults or peers, inconsistent accounts, lack of personal belongings or signs of neglect, and must report any concerns to the DSL immediately.

Stalking, coercive and controlling behaviour;

Stalking, coercive and controlling behaviour can include repeated unwanted contact, monitoring, intimidation, isolation, manipulation, threats, humiliation or restrictions on a person's freedom. Children may experience this directly in their own relationships, witness it within the home, or be affected by the impact it has on a parent or carer. Such behaviour may occur face-to-face and/or online. Staff should take all concerns seriously, listen carefully, record accurately and report to the DSL so that risks can be assessed and appropriate support or referrals can be made.

Technology-assisted abuse.

Technology-assisted abuse is abuse that is carried out, enabled or intensified through digital technology. This may include online harassment, threats, grooming, image-based abuse, monitoring, impersonation, coercion, bullying, the sharing of nude or semi-nude images, or the use of artificial intelligence to alter, generate or distribute harmful content. Abuse can take place wholly online or technology may be used to facilitate offline harm. Staff should follow the setting's online safety and safeguarding procedures, preserve relevant information where appropriate, and report concerns to the DSL promptly.

References: Department for Education, Keeping children safe in education 2026; Department for Education, Working together to safeguard children 2026; UK Council for Internet Safety, Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people; Home Office, Prevent duty guidance: for England and Wales.