

Safeguarding children and young people within the play sector

The support and protection of children cannot be achieved by a single agency... Every service has to play its part. All staff must have placed upon them the clear expectation that their primary responsibility is to the child and his or her family.¹

Lord Laming (2003)

Introduction

Children have the right to be safe and happy in activities, and parents have a right to believe that the organisation is safe. Play settings have a duty to care for the children whom they provide activities and services for. Good child protection practice protects not only children, but also the staff and volunteers who have responsibility for them. This is called a safeguarding culture.

Whilst most organisations are run by well-intentioned, honest and reliable people, we know that the few who are determined to harm children, deliberately seek out groups and organisations where they can meet children. A safeguarding culture will discourage them from becoming involved and make it harder for them to harm or abuse children.²

Legislation

The duty to make arrangements to safeguard and promote welfare is part of the Every Child Matters Change for Children programme, enshrined in the Children Act 2004. The responsibilities of agencies are set out in *Statutory guidance on making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under section 11 of the Children Act 2004*, (2005).³ This guidance supports implementation of section 11. The arrangements by which agencies should work together to safeguard and promote child welfare are described in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2006)⁴

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Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined as:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of children's health or development
- ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.

Undertaking that role enables children to have optimum life chances and to enter adulthood successfully.²



The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006⁷ provides the legislative framework for a new Vetting and Barring Scheme. This will replace the existing system of List 99, Protection of Children Act and Protection of Vulnerable Adults and Disqualification Orders with a single list of those barred from working with children and an aligned list of those barred from working with vulnerable adults.

Local Safeguarding Children Board

The establishment of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB) is an important element of the improved safeguards for children; it was put in place by the Children Act 2004. Each local authority was required to have an LSCB by April 2006. The LSCBs are inter-agency bodies consisting of the main agencies and professionals responsible for safeguarding children from abuse and neglect. The objective of LSCBs is to coordinate and ensure the effectiveness of their member agencies in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. *Working Together to Safeguard Children*⁴ sets out the guidance for LSCBs, including their membership and their functions. LSCB membership includes local authorities, health bodies, the police and others. *Working Together to Safeguard Children*⁴ explains that individual employers are responsible for ensuring that their staff are competent and confident in carrying out their responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting children's welfare. Employers should ensure that their employees are aware of how to recognise and respond to safeguarding concerns, including signs of possible maltreatment. Meanwhile, LSCBs have a role in ensuring that single-agency and inter-agency training on safeguarding is provided to meet local needs. However, it is not necessarily the responsibility of the LSCB to organise or deliver this training.

LSCBs also develop policies and procedures for safeguarding based on national guidance. This may include policies and procedures on checking the suitability of people applying for work with children and ensuring the children's workforce is properly supervised.

It is advisable that all organisations working with children and young people are aware of the LSCB and its work. They should be acquainted with LSCB policies and procedures and know how to access training and guidance on safeguarding. LSCBs often publish key local information, either electronically or in print. Local authorities should have the details for individual LSCBs on their websites. A list of the chair people of LSCBs can be found on the Every Child Matters website.⁶

The role and responsibilities of play services

*Working Together to Safeguard Children*⁴ sets out, for the first time, the key arrangements for safeguarding for all organisations, including play settings. These apply to all public, private or voluntary organisations that provide services for, or work with, children.

Be child-centred

Children should be given every opportunity to learn that no one has the right to do anything to them that makes them feel uncomfortable. They should be taught and encouraged not to put up with any behaviour from adults or children that makes them feel threatened.

It is important to establish open and honest discussion with children and young people about all kinds of issues that will affect them while they are attending your service. It is also important that children learn to manage risk themselves.

Identify a named person

Organisations should identify a named person at senior management level, or equivalent, to champion the importance of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. Everyone in the organisation should know who this is and how to contact them. The named person responsible for making referrals needs to have had basic child protection training, and needs to know who to contact in the police, health, education and social services when concerned about a child's welfare.

Develop policies and procedures

All play organisations need policies and procedures for safeguarding and child protection. A policy statement sets out:

- what the organisation wishes to convey
- why the organisation is undertaking this action
- how the organisation will fulfil this responsibility
- who it applies and relates to
- application of policy with cross-reference to other relevant policies and procedures.

Policies and procedures should be regularly monitored and reviewed, to ensure that they are being followed through consistently.

Monitor the actions of staff

Senior managers need to monitor the actions of their staff, to ensure that children and young people are listened to appropriately and that concerns expressed about their welfare, or the welfare of any other child, are taken seriously and responded to in an appropriate manner.

Have a clear statement of the agency's responsibilities towards children

All staff should be made aware of their organisation's policies and procedures on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. They should also be aware of the importance of listening to children and young people, particularly when they are expressing concerns about either their own or other children's welfare. Staff should also know who to contact within the organisation to express concerns about a child's welfare.

Effective systems should be put in place for children, staff and other people to make a complaint when there are concerns that action to safeguard and promote a child's welfare has not been taken in accordance with the agency's procedures.

Staff induction, training and support on safeguarding

Staff should have an understanding of their own roles and responsibilities and those of other professionals and organisations. Induction programmes are excellent for introducing new staff to organisations and should include safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures.

It is a good idea to have a trial period of employment, for example, six months. Staff should understand that appointment is conditional on the successful completion of that trial period. Attention should be given to the new worker's approach to working with children and commitment to them.

Training on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children should be proportional and relevant to the roles and responsibilities of each staff member. It can be an opportunity for developing new skills, or learning new factual information that affects their role. NSPCC has developed a range of resources, designed to assist organisations in providing child protection awareness training at different levels; see further information, page 4. LSCBs take an overview of local safeguarding training, and in some areas organise or deliver it themselves.

Support and regular supervision provides an opportunity for both supervisors and staff and volunteers to share any concerns about the work. Supervision also conveys the message that you take your responsibility seriously and are available to support staff.

Safe recruitment processes

Robust recruitment and vetting procedures should be put in place, to help prevent unsuitable people from working with children. Thorough checks should be carried out on all people and references

must always be taken up.

Procedures for handling and dealing with allegations of abuse should also be put in place. *Working Together to Safeguard Children*⁴ explains what needs to happen when an allegation is made. Local authorities have designated officers for the management and overseeing of individual cases. They can provide advice and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations, liaise with the police and other agencies, and monitor the progress of cases to ensure that they are dealt with as quickly as possible, and are consistent with a thorough and fair process.

Under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, discretionary barring decisions, which prevent individuals from working with children, will be taken by an independent panel of experts who will draw upon both hard and soft information. There will be a system of continuous updating, so that repeated Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks will no longer be necessary – employers will be able to check an individual's status online.

The new scheme will require employers to check with the CRB that staff have applied to be vetted by the scheme and are not barred from working with children. In some cases a full CRB enhanced disclosure will also be required as part of the check. Initially, checks under the scheme will only be required for new staff. The requirements will extend to those working with children who have not previously been subject to such requirements, including temporary, agency, contract staff, and volunteers. The scheme will be phased in from autumn 2008. For more information visit the every child matters website at www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/vettingandbarring

For information about how to apply for CRB checks, contact the CRB helpdesk or see their website; see further information, page 4, for details.

However, a CRB check alone cannot be relied upon to screen out all abusers – first time offenders and those without a conviction would not be picked up – so the whole recruitment process must contribute to safeguarding children. To recruit safely employers must:

- ask for written declarations from prospective employees stating that they have no past convictions, cautions and no pending cases that might be considered as unsuitable for work with children
- ask for photographic documentation to confirm identity
- always check qualification documentation
- always have two people on the interview panel

and use the interview to explore child protection policies

- ask for, and take up, written references from at least two people who are not family members
- verify references and record them properly in staff files.

Play organisations will need to consider the lower age limit to check volunteers – currently recommended at 14. You will also need to consider new employees from abroad and whether checks are likely to be obtained.

In general, checks will need to be repeated periodically; once every three years is currently recommended. The *Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education* document offers some useful guidance on safe recruitment practice. See further information, page 4, for details.

A code of behaviour

It is a good idea to think about how you expect everyone to behave in your organisation. This includes staff, volunteers, parents and children. It is important that a code of behaviour reflects the child-centred principles of the organisation. The code should be known, and signed up to, by all children, young people and workers, and it should be prominently displayed.

Quality assurance schemes

Quality assurance schemes enable organisations to work towards and demonstrate high standards in safeguarding and protecting children, thus demonstrating their ongoing commitment to giving a high quality service.

London Play offers *Quality in Play* (QiP), a quality assurance scheme for playwork provision. QiP contains elements on safeguarding children and young people within play settings. QiP is endorsed by Investors in Children, a government approval of quality assurance scheme. These schemes have to meet rigorous criteria. For more information, visit London Play's website; see further information, page 4.

4Children offers the quality assurance scheme called Aiming Higher for playwork provision. Aiming Higher is also a government-approved scheme carrying Investors in Children status.

An organisational checklist

Organisations should:

- have in place a child protection policy and procedure that is regularly monitored and reviewed
- have a named person for dealing with concerns or allegations of abuse and clear step-by-step guidance on what action to take
- Implement a rigorous recruitment and selection process for paid staff and volunteers who work with children
- maintain a written code of practice that outlines good practice for working with children
- implement a training plan and provide regular opportunities for all those in contact with children to learn about safeguarding arrangements
- establish a 'whistle-blowing' policy – this is an open and well-publicised way in which adults and young people can voice concerns
- provide up-to-date information for children, young people, parents and carers about child protection policy and where to go for help
- encourage and maintain a protective culture that puts children's interests first – children must feel confident that someone will listen and take them seriously
- develop policies on bullying and health and safety, and procedures for dealing with complaints and for taking necessary disciplinary action².

Further information

If you are concerned about a child, or a child tells you something themselves

Follow the guidance in *What To Do If You're Worried A Child Is Being Abused* (2006). This should be available in all play settings.
www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

4Children

Offers Aiming Higher a government recognised quality assurance scheme.
www.4children.org.uk/whatwedo/view/node/160

Children Act 2004

Legislates for children and young people and provides a national framework for change.
www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040031.htm

Criminal Records Bureau

Provides step-by-step guide to obtaining CRB checks.
www.crb.gov.uk/www.disclosure.gov.uk

Every Child Matters

Provides a wide range of information on safeguarding children. The ECM website holds a series of published documents that provide guidance on the Children Act 2004, to support local authorities and their partners in implementing the new statutory duties.
www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

Fair Play for Children

PlayAction Guide on Child Protection in Playwork.
www.arunet.co.uk/fairplay/child_p.htm

NSPCC

Offers online child protection resources. A particularly useful one is *Stopcheck: A step-by-step guide for organisations to safeguard children* (2006). London: NSPCC.
www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform

NSPCC has also produced *Safe Communities: A toolkit to protect children and young people*. London: NSPCC.
www.nspcc.org.uk/toolkit

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline

The NSPCC Child Protection Helpline is a free 24-hour service that provides counselling, information and advice to anyone concerned about a child at risk of abuse.

Telephone: 080 8800 5000 Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

Quality in Play

A quality assurance scheme for out-of-school play and childcare provision to ensure quality play opportunities for children.
www.londonplay.org.uk

Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education

Sets out the responsibilities of all local authorities, schools and further education colleges in England to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. It sets out recruitment best practice.
www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

Working Together to Safeguard Children

A DfES guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/workingtogether

References

¹ Lord Laming (2003) *The Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report*. London: The Stationery Office.

² NSPCC (2006) *Stopcheck: A step-by-step guide for organisations to safeguard children*.

³ *Statutory guidance on making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under section 11 of the Children Act 2004 (2005)*. London: The Stationery Office.
www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/_files/FF30C3EA8250871345738CFA44EA3197.pdf

⁴ *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2006). A Guide to interagency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. London: The Stationery Office.
www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/workingtogether

⁶ Information on Local Safeguarding Children Boards
www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/lscb

⁷ The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006

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