

Accessing support when you suspect or know there has been abuse of children and young people with learning disabilities

This brief information sheet has been prepared for families whose children/ young people have been at schools where abuse or suspected abuse has taken place.

What is safeguarding?

Safeguarding is the action that is taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm.

Safeguarding means:

- Protecting children from abuse and maltreatment
- Preventing harm to children's health or development
- Ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care
- Taking action to enable all children and young people to have the best outcomes

Child protection is part of the safeguarding process. It focuses on protecting individual children identified as suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. This includes child protection procedures which detail how to respond to concerns about a child ([NSPCC definition](#)).

Key points

It is important to:

- Ensure that your child/ young person/ relative is safe now and getting the support they need
- Get access to support and information that is independent and trusted:
 - To help and support your child/ young person/ relative
 - To help and support you

Making sure your relative is safe now

Many children and young people with learning disabilities, autism and mental health conditions receive good quality care and support. However, abuse and poor care can take place anywhere, and it is crucial that disabled children are protected from harm by clear safeguards and child protection measures. Families are often particularly concerned when their family member is being cared for far away from home and they are unable to visit regularly.

What should you do if you are concerned about a child or young person?

If you are concerned about the safety and/or welfare of a family member, there are steps you should take to keep them safe.

To raise your concerns, you should:

- Call the police straight away if you think a crime may have been committed or that someone is in immediate danger
- Contact social services to tell them what you are worried about; there will be a local 24-hour telephone number. Social services are usually split into a child team and an adult team

You may be connected to a duty social worker who can tell you what they will do next, such as discuss your concerns with the safeguarding team, or ask you to fill in an online form.

Finding your LA and safeguarding team

You can find the local authority where your child/ young person/ relative is staying by entering the postcode of the school./ service on this website:

[Find your local council - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

The local authority site will have a search box - type in "safeguarding" and it will direct you to the right place to make the report.

For confidential advice about child protection or if you have concerns for the wellbeing of a child you can also call [NSPCC's free and confidential helpline](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/our-services/helpline) on 0808 800 5000 or email help@nspcc.org.uk.

Raising a safeguarding concern is different from making a complaint. Try to be clear and specific about your concerns and don't worry about being criticised for wasting time. We all have a duty to speak out when we feel something is not right.

What should you do if you think an organisation is putting children at risk?

Raising your concerns is a vital process for identifying risks to people's safety. Abuse and poor care must be challenged, but sometimes this can feel hard to do.

The routes to make these challenges include safeguarding, using advocacy, complaints processes, Care Programme Approach (CPA) meetings for people detained under the Mental Health Act and sometimes by legal challenges.

Schools and residential settings caring for children should have their own procedures for dealing with safeguarding concerns or allegations. If you want to speak to the school or home directly, the **Designated Safeguarding Lead** is the lead professional responsible for child protection matters.

If you are a professional, one way you can raise concerns about the practice of an organisation is **whistleblowing**.

If you are worried about how child protection issues are being dealt with in your own or another organisation, and you are concerned that your worries will not be dealt with properly, you will be protected by whistleblowing procedures. Disclosing information about wrongdoing in this way is protected by the law.

You can find out more about **whistleblowing for employees** on the [Government website](#).

The [NSPCC's Whistleblowing Advice Line](#) is also available to help you discuss your concerns and follow the relevant procedures.

You can also contact the **Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)** working in your area, who is responsible for managing allegations of abuse against people working with children. The LADO works within the children's services department of a local authority and is legally responsible for investigating complaints made about professionals working with children in their local authority. Details of your local LADO should be easily accessible on your local authority's website.

Getting information and support

When things go wrong it can be hard to know what to do. It is important to get information and advice from people you trust who can help and support you.

A) Support for your child/ young person/ relative

Your child's/ young person's social worker (who is employed by your local authority) should be a good source of support and information. Ask them to provide information and support with:

- Any current concerns regarding their education, care and support
- Access to education, care and support that meets your child/ young person's assessed needs – including finding new providers if required
- Therapies or support for the abuse and/ trauma they have experienced
- Groups and organisations that can provide independent support and information, including peer support groups (see below also)

B) Support for you

Independent, free support and information is available for families and individuals from a range of charities and organisations; some are listed below. These include organisations that specialise in information and support and organisations that specialise in emotional or legal support.

Information, support and helplines

The following organisations have helplines that offer information:

Ann Craft Trust

Advice for anyone concerned with the protection of vulnerable children and adults.

Website: www.anncrafttrust.org

Contact No: 0115 951 5400 (Office hours Monday – Thursday 9am – 5pm and 9am – 4pm on Friday)

Email: ann-craft-trust@nottingham.ac.uk

Challenging Behaviour Foundation

Support for families of children and adults with severe learning disabilities who display challenging behaviour.

Website: www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk

Family Support Service: 0300 666 0126 (available 9am – 5pm Monday to Thursday and 9am – 3pm Fridays)

Email: support@theCBF.org.uk

Hft

The Family Carer Support Service is a service for family carers in England, who have a relative with a learning disability and/or autism.

Website: www.hft.org.uk/familycarersupport

Freephone: 0808 801 0448

Email: familycarersupport@hft.org.uk

Mencap

Advice and information on issues relevant to people with learning disabilities and their families.

Website: www.mencap.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 808 1111 (lines open Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm).

Email: helpline@mencap.org.uk

National Autistic Society (NAS)

Support people with autism and their families.

Website: www.autism.org.uk

Respond

Working with children and adults with learning disabilities who have experienced abuse or trauma, as well as those who have abused others.

Website: www.respond.org.uk

Telephone: 020 7383 0700

Speak Up Direct - Whistleblowing Helpline

If you are a member of staff working in the NHS or social care sector and you have concerns about abuse in your workplace, you can contact Speak Up Directly. You can speak to them anonymously.

Website: www.speakup.direct

Helpline: 08000 724725

Also contact via website or use online tool

Organisations that specialise in emotional support

Shout

Text SHOUT to 85258 for immediate support, 24/7

More information about Shout here: <https://giveusashout.org/get-help/>

The Samaritans

Call The Samaritans on 116 123 (24/7, 365 days a year)

Email The Samaritans: jo@samaritans.org (24hr response time)

More information about The Samaritans here: <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/>

Support Line

Call SupportLine on 01708 765200

Email SupportLine: info@supportline.org.uk

More information about Supportline here: www.supportline.org.uk

Mind

Mind have a list of other crisis services here: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/crisis-services/helplines-listening-services/>

Legal Support

You may want to explore your legal rights and options with help from a specialist lawyer. Make sure your lawyer not only understands abuse but also understands learning disability. Check your lawyer has knowledge about human rights, community care and the Mental Capacity Act (if your relative is over 16) as this can be helpful.

You may wish to consider the firms on [this list](#) compiled by Steve Broach, a public law barrister. This is not a definitive list of all law firms – rather they are firms Steve has worked with.

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation have a list of specialist legal aid solicitors - you can request a copy of this by emailing support@thecbf.org.uk.

For more information about the law please use [this link](#).

Further Information

For further information about concerns about the quality of care or safety of someone with a learning disability, see the Challenging Behaviour Foundation website [here](#).