



## 7. Learning from Serious Child Safeguarding Incidents

Requirements around serious incident notifications have been strengthened to improve consistency, transparency and learning. Notifications are required even when full details are not yet available, and should include all children affected, not only the index child.

Expectations for learning are reinforced through strengthened timescales, with rapid reviews required within 15 working days. These changes emphasise the importance of timely notification, accurate information sharing and meaningful multi-agency learning, ensuring that safeguarding partners identify themes, address system issues and improve practice promptly.

## 6. Stronger accountability in Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements now clearly encompass looked-after children, reinforcing that safeguarding responsibility does not diminish due to care status. Expectations are strengthened around collective leadership, scrutiny and shared accountability across safeguarding partners.

Safeguarding partners are expected to make more effective use of data to identify disproportionality, inequality and differing experiences of services, and to use this analysis to inform strategic decision-making and improvement. Annual safeguarding reports must demonstrate the impact of arrangements on children and families, rather than focusing solely on structures or activity. This places greater emphasis on outcome-focused assurance and evidence of learning and change.

## 5. Recognition that children may experience multiple and overlapping harms

Children may experience simultaneous or multiple harms, for example domestic abuse alongside neglect, exploitation, parental substance misuse, mental ill-health, or online harm. These experiences often interact and compound risk, rather than occurring in isolation.

This reinforces the expectation that safeguarding responses should not be organised around single issues or thresholds alone. Agencies are expected to work together to deliver coordinated and holistic responses that reflect the full context of a child's lived experience. In practice, this has implications for assessment models, planning and review processes, and requires services to avoid fragmented or sequential interventions that can obscure cumulative risk or delay protection.

## 4. Strengthened guidance on domestic abuse and child sexual abuse

The guidance reinforces that domestic abuse is a safeguarding issue for children, including where harm is indirect, not immediately visible, or linked to coercive and controlling behaviour between adults. Practitioners are reminded that children can be significantly affected by living with domestic abuse, even where they are not the direct victim, and that this should inform assessment, planning and decision-making.

There is expanded and clearer content on child sexual abuse, including hidden and intrafamilial abuse, teenage relationship abuse and group-based exploitation. Expectations are strengthened for timely multi-agency assessments, purposeful information sharing, direct work with children, and effective strategy discussions when concerns are identified. In practice, agencies should ensure responses are child-centred, proactive and coordinated, with children's experiences and safety remaining central throughout safeguarding processes.

## 1. Introduction

[Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026](#) replaces the 2023 statutory guidance. The 2026 update strengthens and clarifies expectations rather than introducing a new framework. Changes focus on addressing racism and discrimination, safeguarding unborn children, strengthening responses to domestic abuse and child sexual abuse, recognising children experiencing multiple harms, improving accountability in safeguarding arrangements, and strengthening learning from serious incidents.

A Department for Education [Summary of Changes](#) document highlights where wording has been clarified or expectations strengthened. Organisations should use this to identify where local policies, procedures, training and assurance activity require update to remain compliant with statutory expectations.

## 2. Explicit inclusion of all children, including unborn children

The guidance now clearly states that safeguarding responsibilities apply to all children, including those in kinship care, special guardianship, adoptive placements and care settings. This removes any ambiguity linked to legal status or placement type.

It also states that practitioners should consider help, support and protection for unborn children where concerns are identified. This strengthens expectations for early information sharing, pre-birth assessment and coordinated multi-agency planning during pregnancy.

## 3. Stronger expectation to challenge racism and discrimination

The 2026 guidance makes clearer that challenging racism, discrimination and inequality is a core safeguarding responsibility. Leaders across agencies are expected to create inclusive and anti-discriminatory cultures, and practitioners are expected to identify and challenge discrimination where it affects children and families.

The guidance recognises that children's experiences and outcomes can be shaped by bias, inequality and previous experiences of services. These factors must be considered as part of safeguarding assessments and decision-making, not treated as separate issues.

In practice, safeguarding partners are expected to consider disproportionality and differential experiences in thresholds, assessments and service responses, and to use supervision, learning and data to identify and address systemic inequality within safeguarding arrangements.

