



# SAFEGUARDING POLICY

PLAY THERAPY UK

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## Introduction

Play Therapy UK (PTUK) as an organisation takes their safeguarding responsibilities seriously at all times. It is committed to ensuring the safety and physical and emotional well-being of children. PTUK recognises that members who work therapeutically will come into contact with children or adults at risk who may be at risk of harm or exploitation including radicalisation as identified in the PTUK Prevent Duty Principles.

As an organisation supporting children's mental health and well-being, we make it our priority to act on any behaviour which might put this at risk. PTUK undertakes the following procedures to reduce any potential risk of harm to children and young people.

In fulfilling these responsibilities PTUK and their members will remain mindful of their obligations under Health and Safety at Work Act (1974), the Children's Act (2004), the data Protection Act (2018), the protection of Freedom of Information Act (2012) and the Counter-terrorism and Security Act (2015).

## Definitions

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.

The term safeguarding is used to refer to several areas of concern relating to children and adults at risk, including:

- Child Protection issues
- Sexual exploitation
- Radicalisation
- Physical, emotional abuse or neglect

**Child or Children:** The Childcare Act 2006 defines a child as a person who has not reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday for most purposes.

**Adult or Adults at Risk:** An Adult at Risk is a person aged 18 or over who:

- May be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness.
- Is or may be unable to take care of him or herself.
- Is unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.  
[www.england.nhs.uk](http://www.england.nhs.uk) (2021).

## **Scope**

This policy applies to all PTUK members and staff. PTUK staff and members have a duty to report suspected safeguarding concerns relating to a child to a relevant DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead) or external agencies dependent on the member's place and status of work (working with an umbrella organisation or in Private Practice).

PTUK as a membership body will ensure an appropriate member of the Senior Management Team is available to inform and signpost PTUK members to the most appropriate agencies.

PTUK will ensure members receive information and advice on safeguarding issues including training as appropriate to their role as therapist.

PTUK will advise and update members regularly during the year regarding their responsibilities to ensure policies and procedures are in place to ensure they are safeguarding children.

PTUK will advise members on their responsibility to ensure they evidence their suitability to work unsupervised with children.

## **Key Safeguarding Principles**

The six principles of safeguarding, defined by the Care Act (2014), underpins the behaviours of employers for ensuring the safeguarding of children and adults at risk.

The six Principles of safeguarding are:

- Empowerment: Children and Adults at Risks being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and give informed consent.
- Prevention: It is better to take action before harm occurs.
- Proportionality: The least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.
- Protection: Support and representation for those in greatest need.
- Partnership: Local solutions through services working with their communities. Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse.
- Accountability: having a visible policy and statement of intent helps everyone in the organisation recognise their own accountability in the protection from and avoidance of abuse or harm.

## **Responsibilities**

PTUK takes safeguarding adults at risk and children seriously, advising PTUK members that everyone who comes into contact with children and families has a role to play. Dependent upon their working environment, members should undertake the following.

PTUK members working **within an organisation** should:

- Undertake safeguarding training level 2 and if working directly with children level 3 (or equivalent);
- Read Safeguarding and Prevent Policy and Procedures;
- Keep abreast of updates to 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' if working within an educational setting;
- Identify the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) within the setting;
- Where a disclosure has been made report concerns in a timely manner to DSL;
- Follow record keeping protocols; and
- Contact Clinical Supervisor for support.

PTUK members working **in Private Practice** should

- Undertake safeguarding training, including DSL training;
- Write Safeguarding and Prevent Policy and Procedures;
- Manage disclosures in line with policy and procedures identified by Local Safeguarding Children's Board;
- Keep abreast of updates to 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' if working within an educational setting;
- Follow record keeping protocols; and
- Contact Clinical Supervisor for support.

**What is Child Abuse?**

Child abuse is any action by another person – adult or child – that causes significant harm to a child. It can be physical, sexual or emotional, but can just as often be about a lack of love, care and attention. We know that neglect, whatever form it takes, can be just as damaging to a child as physical abuse.

An abused child will often experience more than one type of abuse, as well as other difficulties in their lives. It often happens over a period of time, rather than being a one-off event and it can increasingly happen online.

**Definitions of Abuse**

For the purpose of this policy safeguarding is defined as protecting children and adults at risk who may be at risk of exploitation (including radicalisation), domestic violence, harm, neglect or abuse. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults or by another child or children.

**Domestic Abuse** is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people in a relationship. It is not just physical violence. Domestic abuse includes emotional, physical, sexual, financial or psychological abuse. Abusive behaviour can occur in any

relationship. It can continue even after the relationship has ended. Both men and women can be abused or abusers.

**Sexual Abuse** A child is sexually abused when they are forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities. This does not have to be physical contact, and it can happen online. Children will often not realise that what is happening to them is abuse. Child Sexual exploitation is a type of sexual abuse in which children are sexually exploited for money, power or status.

**Neglect** This is the most common form of child abuse. Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs. A child may be left hungry or dirty, without adequate clothing, shelter, supervision, medical or health care. A child may be put in danger or not protected from physical or emotional harm. They may not get love, care and attention they need from parents or carers. A child who is neglected will often suffer from other abuse as well. Neglect is dangerous and can cause serious, long-term damage – even death.

**Online Abuse** is any type of abuse that happens on the web, whether through social networks, playing online games or using mobile phones. Children and young people may experience cyberbullying, grooming, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or emotional abuse.

Children can be at risk of online abuse from people they know, as well as from strangers. Children can feel there is no escape from online abuse as abusers can contact them day and night and the abuse can come into the safe places like their bedrooms. In the UK 'sex texting' is a reportable offence so schools have a duty to report this to the police when found.

**Physical Abuse** is deliberately hurting a child causing injuries such as bruises, broken bones, burns or cuts. It is not accidental. Children who are physically abused suffer violence such as being hit, kicked, poisoned, burned, slapped or having objects thrown at them.

Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child. This is known as Fabricated or Induced Illness (FII) There is no excuse for physically abusing a child. It causes serious, and often long-lasting, harm – and in severe cases, death.

**Emotional abuse** is the ongoing emotional maltreatment of a child. It is sometimes called psychological abuse and can seriously damage a child's emotional health and development. Children who are emotionally abused are often suffering another type of abuse at the same time – but this is not always the case. Emotional abuse can involve deliberately trying to scare or humiliate a child or isolating or ignoring them.

**Bullying and cyberbullying** is a behaviour that hurts someone else – such as name calling, hitting, pushing, spreading rumours, threatening or undermining someone. It can happen anywhere – at school, at home or online. It is usually repeated over a long period of time and can hurt a child both physically and emotionally. Bullying that happens online, using social networks is often called cyberbullying.

**Child trafficking** and modern slavery are child abuse. Children are recruited, moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work or sold. Children are trafficked for child sexual exploitation, benefit fraud, forced marriage, domestic servitude such as cleaning, childcare or

cooking. Children are often forced into labour in factories or agriculture or criminal activity such as pickpocketing, begging, transporting drugs and bag theft.

**Grooming** is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or trafficking. Children can be groomed online, face-to-face, by a stranger or by someone they know. This might be a family member, friend or professional. Groomers might be male or female and can be any age. Many children do not understand that they have been groomed or that what has happened is abusive. NSPCC (2018)

**Peer-on-peer sexual abuse** is sexual abuse that happens between children of a similar age or stage of development. It can happen between any number of children and can affect any age group (Department for Education (DfE), 2018). It can be harmful to the children who display it as well as those who experience it. NSPCC (2021)

**Adults at risk** is any person who is aged 18 years or over and at risk of abuse or neglect because of their needs for care and or support.

### **Managing disclosures**

PTUK members, when dealing with a disclosure, should follow the organisation's policies and procedures. This will likely involve:

- listening carefully and stay calm; advise the child that you will need to inform someone;
- making sure you have understood the matter under discussion, clarifying points if necessary;
- reassuring the child that by telling you, they have done the right thing;
- informing the child that you must pass on the information now but only to those who need to know; inform them who you are going to tell;
- taking a note of the main points of conversation including names, times, dates, etc, together with any injuries observed.

Members should report the conversation to the DSL in a timely manner, or if in Private Practice should follow their local reporting processes. Regardless of the reporting route members should report the information, complete the relevant form and email it as soon as possible to the relevant agency:

- **England:** Contact the Children's Social Care Team/MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) at the Local Council. For the correct telephone number to call <https://www.gov.uk/report-child-abuse-to-local-council> .
- **Scotland:** [www.mygov.scot/report-child-abuse/](http://www.mygov.scot/report-child-abuse/)
- **Wales:** <https://www.gov.wales/safeguarding-children-reporting-suspected-abuse-neglect-or-harm>

- **Northern Ireland:** <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/local-councils-in-northern-ireland>

In addition, in all cases the PTUK member should contact their Clinical Supervisor for further support.

## **Regional safeguarding guidance**

### England

The Department for Education (DfE) provides the key statutory guidance for anyone working with children and young people: *Working together to safeguard children* (DfE), (2018) which was updated in 2023 - [Working together to safeguard children 2023](#) This sets out how organisations should work together to keep children safe.

The DfE's guidance *What to do if you're worried a child is being abused* describes the actions to take if you think a child is being abused or neglected - [What to do if you're worried a child is being abused](#).

### Scotland

In Scotland, the *National Guidance for Child Protection* (Scottish Government 2014) provides a framework for anyone who might face child protection issues, which was updated in 2023 - [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland](#). This includes third sector organisations (voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, co-operatives and mutuals).

### Wales

The Welsh Government has published *Working Together to Safeguard People* (Welsh Government 2019), which provides guidance and codes of practice that sets out how agencies and practitioners should work together to safeguard children, which was updated in 2022 - [Working together to safeguard people: code of safeguarding practice](#).

The Wales Safeguarding Procedures provides information for how child protection referrals, actions and plans should be carried out - [Safeguarding Wales](#) .

### Northern Ireland

The Department of Health (DOH) in Northern Ireland has published *Co-operating to safeguard children and young people in Northern Ireland* (DOH, 2017) - [Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland](#).

The Revised regional core child protection policies and procedures for Northern Ireland explain what actions people who work with children should take if they have concerns about a child or young person's welfare (Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, 2019) - [Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland Procedures Manual](#).

## Data Protection

Data Protection law allows practitioners to share information when required to identify children at risk of harm and to safeguard them from harm. Data protection law does not prevent practitioners from doing this: instead, it helps them share information in a fair, proportional and lawful way. Further advice on data protection considerations is provided by the Information Commissioner's Office and is available at [A 10 step guide to sharing information to safeguard children | ICO](#)

## Eligibility to work with children

PTUK members must evidence they are able to meet safer recruitment protocols, whether on placement, self-employed or in private practice. This will include having available:

- A current Suitability check, such as an Enhanced DBS / Access NI / Garda Vetting / Scottish PVG;
- A Curriculum Vitae with full working history, and you are able to account for any periods you were not working;
- References.

## Safeguarding training

PTUK members working with Adults at Risk, children or supervising play therapists require regular safeguarding training to refresh knowledge and keep abreast of changes to legislation. Safeguarding training should be undertaken every three years as a minimum requirement. Each UK region will have a responsibility to provide safeguarding training to professionals who work with children.

There are different levels to safeguarding training (L2, L3, DSL) and members need to ensure they have undertaken the most appropriate level of safeguarding training relevant to their work.

Outlined below are details of relevant trainings:

### Prevent and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) online training:

- **Prevent Awareness**, an introduction into the risks of radicalisation and the role that professionals and practitioners can play in supporting those at risk: <https://www.elearning.prevent.homeoffice.gov.uk/edu/screen2.html>
- **FGM**, an introduction to recognising and preventing FGM: <https://www.fgmelearning.co.uk/>

### Other safeguarding training available:

- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Protecting Children from Domestic Abuse

- Safeguarding children with SEND/disabilities
- Protecting Children from County Lines

### Further support and guidance

The NHS provides an Independent Health Providers Safeguarding Forum (IHPSF) which acts as a community of practice, providing opportunities for safeguarding professionals in the independent sector to discuss safeguarding topics and share information, ideas, experiences and challenges. Practitioners can apply to have access to this Forum, which also offers an annual safeguarding conference and quarterly online forum for discussion of relevant initiatives and shared best practice. For further information practitioners should contact [contact@ptukorg.com](mailto:contact@ptukorg.com).

### **Safeguarding Complaint about a PTUK Member**

PTUK members work in isolation unsupervised with children and follow and implement PTUK's Ethical Framework when working therapeutically with children. PTUK believes children have the right to be safe at all times.

Where a member of the public reports concerns about the behaviour and/or treatment of a PTUK member towards a child or young person, PTUK has a duty to act on this information by following their Complaints and Concerns Procedure. Further information is available in both the PTUK Complaints and Concerns Procedure and the PTUK Procedure for Managing Safeguarding Concerns from the Public which outline the procedures that would be followed.

### **What to do if you have a clinical query about a safeguarding concern or issue**

Should a PTUK member have a clinical query regarding a safeguarding issue or concern they can contact PTUK's DSL on [dsl@ptukorg.com](mailto:dsl@ptukorg.com).

### **Useful information:**

A Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is a multi-agency body set up in every local authority led by three partners (local authorities, chief officers of police, and clinical commissioning groups). Each LSCB has an independent Chair, that is, someone who doesn't work for social services. The Chair will work closely with the Director of Children's Services.

Multi agency safeguarding hub (MASH), is a team that is made up of are Qualified Social Workers co-located with the Children's Reception Team (CRT). Both teams work in conjunction with one another to safeguard children. The MASH team will only receive cases from CRT where concerns for children are evident and further investigation is required.

**Useful links:**

- Keeping Children Safe in Education  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>
- <https://www.gov.uk/topic/schools-colleges-childrens-services/safeguarding-children>
- <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection>
- <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/child-protection-and-safeguarding>
- [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/839253/moj-county-lines-practical-guidance-frontline-practitionerspdf.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/839253/moj-county-lines-practical-guidance-frontline-practitionerspdf.pdf)
- <https://www.barnardos.ie/learning-development/protecting-safeguarding-children-online>

**This policy links to:**

PTUK Complaints Procedure

PTUK Ethical Framework

PTUK Procedure for Managing Safeguarding Concerns from the Public

PTUK Prevent Duty

PTUK Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults

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