



Safeguarding CODAs Without Making Assumptions

Evidence-led safeguarding, avoiding discriminatory assumptions and ensuring accessible family participation.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

Designated safeguarding leads and social workers

A practical professional resource to support respectful, individualised practice with Children of Deaf Adults and their families. CODA identity is not itself a diagnosis, deficit, safeguarding indicator or support need.

SCOPE AND STATUS

This is general professional guidance, not legal advice, a statutory procedure or a substitute for local safeguarding policies. Duties differ across England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland. Verify local requirements before applying this resource.

A non-discriminatory starting point

A Deaf parent's hearing status is not itself evidence of abuse, neglect or inability to parent. Neither is being a CODA a safeguarding category. At the same time, professionals must respond to genuine evidence of harm, unmet needs or exploitation in the same child-centred way as for any child.

Safeguarding decisions require facts, analysis, consultation, consideration of protective factors and accessible family engagement where safe.

- Separate observed events from interpretations.
- Ask whether service inaccessibility is being mistaken for parental non-engagement.
- Use qualified communication support in assessment and strategy processes.

SUPERVISION CHALLENGE

Would our concern persist if the service had provided effective communication access from the outset?

Assessment of interpreting-related burdens

Explore what the child is doing, for whom, how frequently, how complex the material is, whether they feel able to refuse and its consequences for wellbeing, attendance or education.

A child helping with an ordinary routine is not automatically harmed; conversely a repeated expectation to communicate confidential, frightening or adult information may create significant risk. Address the external service failure as well as any effects on the child.

- Ask about medical, legal, financial and statutory conversations.
- Explore conflict of interest and emotional impact.
- Arrange safe adult communication without relying on the child.

Accessible, child-centred enquiries

Professionals should hear the child's account in an appropriate and safe manner and engage Deaf parents directly through necessary access arrangements. An interpreter must be able to handle the setting and maintain professional standards.

Do not ask a sibling or the child concerned to interpret the parent's safeguarding interview. Record any access limitations, explanations, chronology and decisions.

- Explain the process, rights and next steps in an accessible form.
- Respect confidentiality and information-sharing duties.
- Consider the child's views, wishes and safety independently.

Thresholds, escalation and jurisdiction

In England, schools and colleges should follow Keeping children safe in education 2026 and their child protection procedures, including immediate reporting to the designated safeguarding lead. Other agencies and jurisdictions must follow their current governing frameworks, including local referral thresholds and emergency procedures.

Do not defer protective action while waiting for ideal communication provision. Put interim safety arrangements in place, obtain suitable interpreting as soon as practicable and document the rationale.

- If immediate danger, call the relevant emergency service.
- Use the designated local child-protection referral route.
- Record exactly what was observed, disclosed, assessed and decided.

Case study: missed meetings and an interpreter gap

A school notes that a Deaf parent has missed three reviews. Staff have telephoned only, despite an earlier request for text or BSL access. The child has been asked to pass on complex information. The correct first response is to fix accessibility, offer a properly supported meeting and assess any demonstrated impact on the child.

If there are separate concerns about harm, assess them with evidence and standard safeguarding processes; do not turn the access failure into an unsupported neglect allegation.

- Audit the contact and access record.
- Hear the parent's account directly.
- Review whether the child has experienced pressure or distress.

PRACTICE RECORD

Write "Three telephone calls were not answered; parent had requested a signed/video or text route" rather than "parent refuses to engage."

Governance and supervision

Regular case auditing can identify discriminatory language, inappropriate child interpreting and preventable exclusions from decisions. Use reflective supervision and quality assurance to distinguish cultural unfamiliarity from safeguarding risk.

- Include Deaf voices and CODA perspectives in professional learning.
- Track whether communication support was requested and supplied.
- Check child outcomes, not only referral or attendance counts.

Professional references and further reading

Department for Education, Keeping children safe in education 2026 (England) — <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

Equality Act 2010 / reasonable adjustment guidance (Great Britain) — <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reasonable-adjustments-a-legal-duty/reasonable-adjustments-a-legal-duty>

Irish Sign Language Act 2017, sections 3, 6 and 7 (Ireland) — <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2017/act/40/enacted/en/html>

PUBLICATION REVIEW NOTE

For public publication, arrange review by suitably experienced Deaf community representatives, CODAs and the relevant education, clinical or safeguarding leads. Re-check current law, policy and organisational procedures at the time of use.