



**WORKING TOGETHER TO
SAFEGUARD CHILDREN
BRIEFING NOTE - MARCH 2026**



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SAFEGUARDING
MATTERS**

The 2026 update to Working Together represents a significant strengthening of the national safeguarding framework in line with the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

It sharpens expectations around culture, accountability, early and family help, child sexual abuse responses, and learning from serious incidents, while clarifying responsibilities for all agencies working with children and families.

Key changes

Stronger Focus on Anti-Racist and Anti-Discriminatory Practice

The guidance places a much clearer expectation on leaders and practitioners to create inclusive, anti-racist safeguarding cultures. Agencies must recognise and challenge discrimination, understand how racism shapes engagement with services, and analyse their own data for disproportionality.

Clearer Responsibilities for All Children — Including Unborn Children

The scope now explicitly includes:

- Children living with birth or extended family
- Children in kinship care, special guardianship, adoption
- Looked-after children in foster or residential care
- Unborn children where safeguarding concerns exist

This reinforces the need for early identification, coordinated planning, and consistent oversight across all settings.

Strengthened Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA)

Safeguarding partners face heightened expectations around:

- Accountability and transparency
- Sharing and analysing data to identify racism and disproportionality
- Demonstrating impact, not just activity, in annual reports
- Ensuring arrangements explicitly cover looked-after children

The update also clarifies how safeguarding partners are inspected and how they should work with other local boards. This also marks a move to more strategic expectations on Safeguarding Leads around analysis of data and understanding of the wider context and cohort of children.

Introduction of a More Integrated 'Family Help' Model

The guidance brings together:

- Targeted early help
- Section 17 support

This creates a single, multi-disciplinary family help offer, with:

- A consistent lead practitioner
- A coordinated family help plan
- Stronger links between early help, child in need, and child protection pathways

The aim is earlier, more relational, and less fragmented support.

Strengthened Guidance on Key Harm Areas

The update reinforces expectations around:

- Child sexual abuse, including strategy discussions and direct work
- Domestic abuse and coercive control
- Infant abuse
- Honour-based and faith-based abuse
- Online harms
- Group-based exploitation

There is a clear emphasis on hidden harms and improving professional curiosity.

Clearer Expectations for Section 47 and Child Protection Work

The guidance strengthens:

- Multi-agency assessments
- Direct work with children
- Integration with family help or care planning
- Timeliness and quality of decision-making

This is designed to improve consistency and reduce drift and delay.

Updated Organisational Responsibilities

Agencies must ensure:

- Stronger oversight of risks for looked-after children, especially in residential settings
- Clearer alignment between care planning and child protection planning
- Updated terminology and signposting to current resources

This section reinforces the need for robust internal systems and governance.

Major Reforms to Learning from Serious Incidents

The guidance clarifies:

- What must be included in Serious Incident Notifications, including deaths of care leavers up to age 24
- The requirement to notify incidents involving adults where childhood harm was previously unknown

The sequence and purpose of:

- Serious Incident Notification
- Rapid Review
- Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review
- The updated 15-day timeline for Rapid Reviews
- Expectations for learning from non-notifiable incidents

This aims to improve national learning and reduce inconsistency.

Overall Impact on schools

- Anti-racist practice moves from “good practice” to core safeguarding compliance. Schools will need to evidence it in policies, training, and data.
- Schools become even more central to early help pathways. DSLs will spend more time in multi-agency planning and coordination.
- Training needs to go deeper. Staff must be confident in spotting subtle, hidden, or relationship-based harms. DSLs will need to update training materials and ensure staff can recognise nuanced indicators. (HHSM plans to introduce mini bitesize training sessions on specific areas from September.)
- Increased demand on DSLs to document decisions, attend multi-agency meetings, and ensure information sharing is timely and defensible.
- Schools will need to strengthen their systems for identifying and recording these contexts, and ensure staff understand the additional vulnerabilities.

In summary it's less about new tasks and more about raising the standard of what good safeguarding looks like with DSLs at the centre of that shift, becoming more strategic.

At HH:SM we will continue to support DSL's in their role in light of the new changes.