Building Support for families

Continuum of need guidance for all who work with children and families in Plymouth

PLYMOUTH SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP









This guidance is designed to help you identify current issues and their impact on the child and family.
Look out for for the icon, as it indicates an interactive feature and links to other information and websites.

Contents

Introduction 3

What role do I play? 4

Understanding the guidance 5

Six golden rules for safe information sharing 6

Resolving Professional Differences 7

Useful guidance, policies and legislation 8

Guidance 9

- Universal needs 9
- Emerging needs 10
- Targetted needs 12
- Specialist needs 14

Further useful resources 16

Introduction

The Plymouth Building Support document is essential guidance for everyone who works with children and their families. It outlines how local practitioners work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children across Plymouth. This is intended to help practitioners identify the right help for children and families at the earliest opportunity, from the service or professional who knows them best.

In this guidance, a child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday (post 18 and up to age 25 with special educational needs and disability will be supported via adult safeguarding and the care act). 'Children' therefore means 'babies, children and young people' throughout. Some parts of this guidance also apply to unborn children recognising their vulnerabilities and the need for early, pre-birth assessment and planning.

This document has been developed in line with the Families First Partnership Guidance (DfE March 2025) and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026.

The document has been developed with partner agency professionals, who are committed to strong multi-agency working to ensure we are achieving the best for all children across Plymouth.



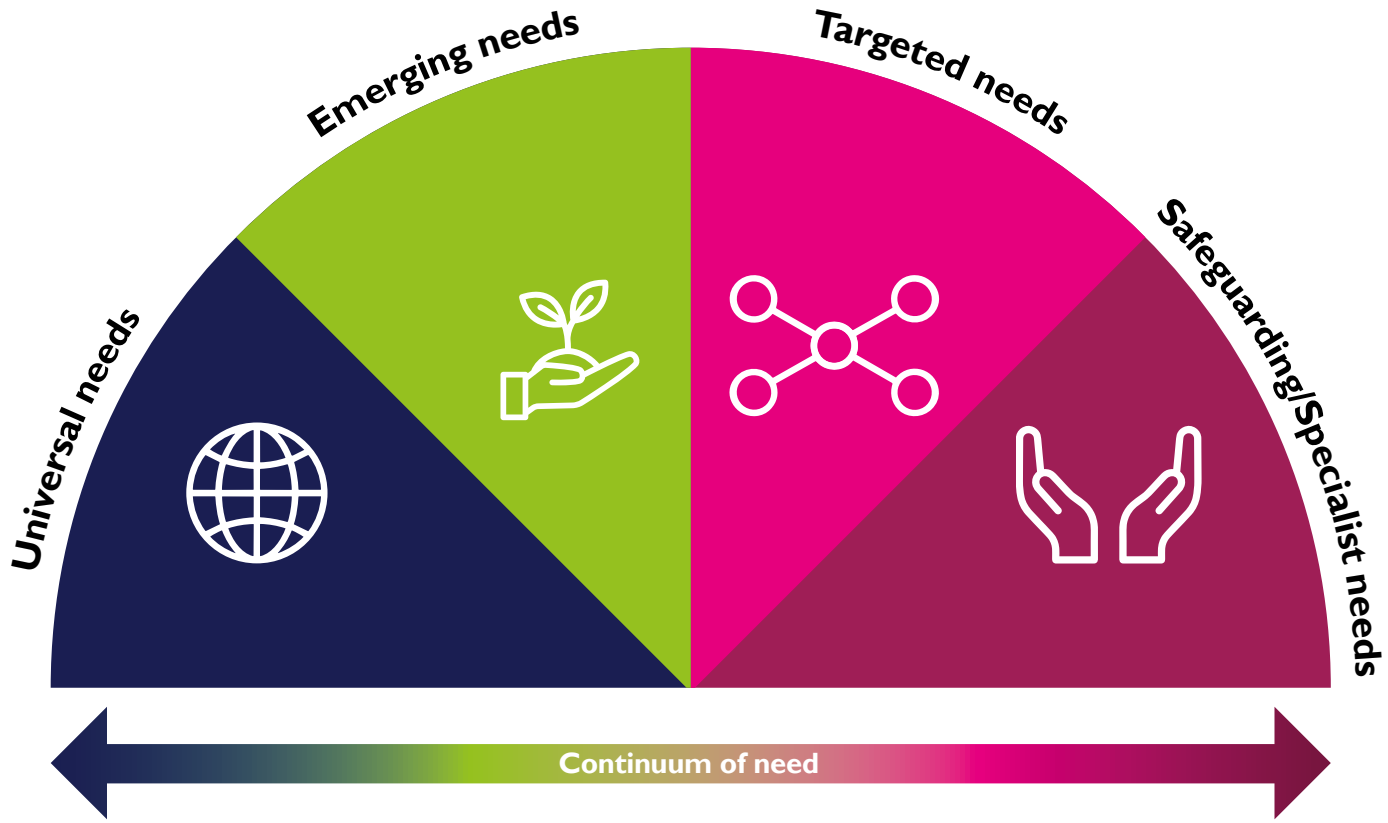


What role do I play?

Everyone who works with children and families in Plymouth has a vital role in building positive and trusting relationships. This enables practitioners to better recognise children and young people's needs and act quickly and proportionately to prevent risks escalating further. The Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership (PSCP) expects practitioners to work in line with social justice principles through a trauma informed approach, demonstrating equality, diversity, inclusion and anti-discriminatory practice. Practitioners should work sensitively, with empathy and cultural humility, ensuring that all children, young people and families are treated fairly, respected and supported, regardless of their background, identity, culture, faith, disability, sex, sexual orientation, socio economic circumstances or lived experiences.

Understanding the guidance

- This guidance sets out the different needs experienced by children, young people and their families within Plymouth. The guidance can be used by all agencies including voluntary services.
- The guidance aims to assist practitioners and their managers to effectively identify current needs and assist them in responding appropriately to such need; this will ensure children, and their families receive the right support at the right time.
- While many children's needs can be met through universal services such as health and education, some children and families may have additional emerging needs, that require timely support to prevent increased vulnerability and the potential need for further or specialist services.
- It is acknowledged that some children will require a more urgent response, where there is reason to believe a child has suffered or likely to suffer significant harm, and as such safeguarding processes and procedures need to be followed.



Information Sharing Duty 2026

New statutory duty creating a stronger expectation for safeguarding partners and relevant agencies to share information when it may help safeguard or promote the welfare of a child.

The duty states Practitioners and organisations must share information when they hold information that is relevant to safeguarding or promoting a child's welfare and sharing it may help another agency carry out its safeguarding responsibilities.

The duty explains the only time information does not have to be shared is if the practitioner believes disclosure would be more detrimental to the child than not sharing it.

Supports early help as well as child protection because the right information shared at the right time can prevent concerns from escalating.

If it is safe to do so we would always advise that notifying a family or child that you will be sharing information with a partner agency is best practice as it helps with shared understanding and any subsequent contact.

Effective safeguarding depends on effective information sharing. If the information you hold could help another professional understand, support or protect a child, the expectation is that you share it.

Resolving professional differences

HOME

Whilst supporting a child, young person or family, there will be times where practitioners have different views about the most appropriate support or services.

Good practice is for the practitioners involved to have a further discussion that is focused on the needs of the child or young person.

Where a resolution is not achieved at this stage, practitioners should speak to their manager and use the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership Resolving Professional Differences Protocol as a guide for seeking resolution:

↗ **https://plymouthscb.co.uk/resolving-professional-differences/**



Useful guidance, policies and legislation

- Children Act 1989 and 2004
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Children and Families act 2014
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Care Act 2014
- Information Sharing Duty 2026
- Data protection act 2018 and UK GDPR
- Human Rights Act 1998 (particularly) Article 8 – Right to Family Life.
- UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child
- Prevent Duty Guidance 2023
- Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive 2024
- Children and Wellbeing in Schools Act 2026
- Safeguarding Adolescents Guidance and Tool-Kit
- Domestic Abuse and Children Guidance and Tool-kit
- Child Sexual Abuse Guidance and Tool-kit
- Neglect Guidance and Tool-kit
- Plymouth Family Hubs
- LADO Advice and Guidance
- The Families First Partnership Programme Guide

Guidance

It is important that all agencies understand the needs of each individual child or young person within their own context and realise that each situation is unique and specific to that child. This document should assist professional judgements and is not an exhaustive list.

Universal need

Most children's needs can be met by their family and universal services/ ordinarily available services, such as education, health, community or voluntary agencies and leisure services. Children at Universal level, make good progress in most areas of their development.

Health and wellbeing

- I am meeting my developmental milestones
- I am taken to all my health appointments; including dental and optician checks
- I am appropriately cared for when unwell
- My developmental checks and immunisations are up to date.
- I have good hygiene
- My clothes are well fitting and appropriate for the weather
- All my nutritional needs are being met
- I have age-appropriate social and communication skills
- My sexual activity is within normal development for my age
- I have a safe place to sleep
- I am using online spaces in an age-appropriate and safe way.

Education and training

- I have good attendance at school/ nursery
- I receive appropriate stimulation, activities, boundaries and guidance
- I have good relationships with my friends
- I am achieving my educational milestones
- I have a good level of self-esteem
- I have plans and aspirations for my future
- I am Electively Home Educated and my needs are being met

Family and environment

- I have secure relationships and positive attachments with my parents/ carers
- My family offer warmth, praise and encouragement I live in a suitable home environment and have consistent care arrangements
- Those caring for me, are active and engaged in protecting me at home and in the community
- My parents/carers are attuned to my emotional needs and wellbeing

Social relationships/ engagement

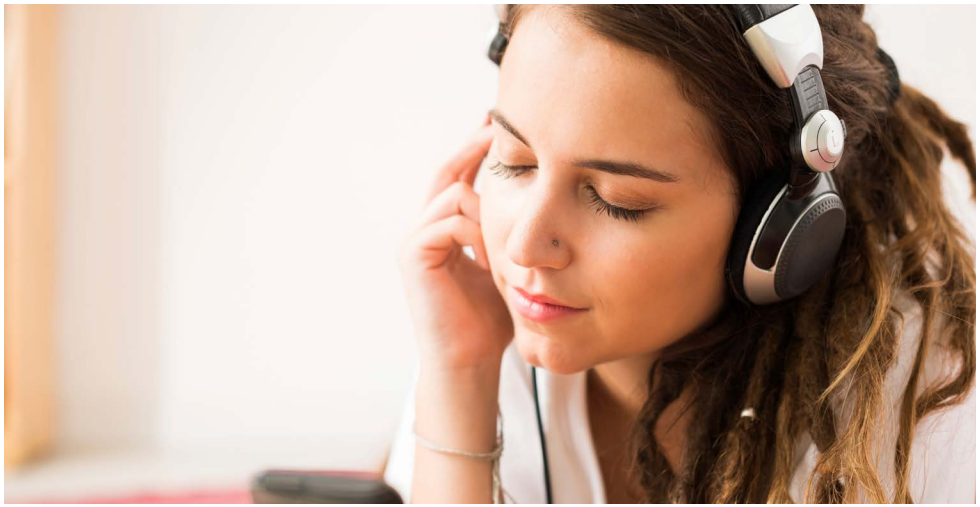
- My parents / carers provide me with stability
- I am provided with support from my immediate / wider family members and have protective and supportive networks
- Help me develop a sense of right and wrong
- My parents / carers can financially provide for me
- I have opportunities to form social relationships/ friendships with peers

Emerging needs – early support and family help

Children and their families have additional or emerging needs that are starting to impact on their daily life. The needs cannot be met through Universal Services alone and these children and their families require additional support.

Health and wellbeing

- I am starting to fall behind with meeting my developmental milestones
- I am not being taken to/ have poor attendance at medical appointments.
- I have a disability/health need that requires additional support, e.g. diabetes, asthma, soiling
- I have frequent illnesses/ infections/ minor injuries.
- My diet/hygiene/sleep routine is impacting on my health and wellbeing.
- I am experiencing difficulties with my emotional wellbeing and self esteem/confidence
- I have started to experiment / present with sexualised behaviour that is not appropriate for my age.
- I have begun to experiment with drugs and /or alcohol
- I am accessing online spaces unsupervised or engaging in online activity that may increase my vulnerability.



Education and training

- I am starting to miss some school/ nursery
- I have some identified learning needs that requires support
- I do not have opportunities for new experiences and learning with my parents/carers
- I sometimes don't want to go to school
- I struggle with concentration/ motivation to learn
- I have received suspensions from school
- I am electively home educated and not receiving all opportunities to learn and meet all education standards
- I am over 16 but currently I am not in any education, employment or training (NEET)

Family and environment

- My parents/carers are not managing to meet my basic care needs and emotional needs consistently
- My parents/carers are struggling with their own emotional needs
- I experience inconsistent attachments with my parents/ carers
- My parents/carers need support, but they miss appointments or do not answer the phone to services

- I am sometimes left on my own at home, when this is inappropriate for my level of maturity
- We may lose our home as our rent has not been paid and there are financial concerns
- I have inconsistent care arrangements.
- I live in a house which is overcrowded and where there is limited heating and cooking facilities
- I am living with family where there are concerns about the use of drugs/alcohol
- I live with my parents/carers who are often falling out to the point of shouting and fighting

Social relationships/engagement

- I am a young carer for my parent/ parents
- I struggle to make friends and to build sustaining relationships with children and adults
- I am a child who is presenting with behaviours, which my parents and school are finding difficult to manage
- I have started to go missing from home
- I have arguments and issues with my neighbours and wider community



Targeted needs – family help

Children / families with multiple unmet or partially met needs that will likely require regular home visits and targeted interventions from a range of partner agencies to address their support needs, this will include Children in Need as defined by the Children Act 1989. Without additional support, the needs of the family are likely to increase and escalate, potentially resulting in statutory interventions being required.

Health and Wellbeing

- I have fallen behind in my developmental milestones and there is evidence of delay
- I am not registered with a GP – my parents have not registered me
- My primary care needs are not being consistently met
- I am experiencing re-occurring health problems
- I am not being taken to essential health appointments and health advice is not consistently sought in a timely manner
- I have complex and/or multiple health issues being met by a variety of health professionals
- I have mental health needs that require additional support
- My hygiene needs are not being met, and I am not being supported to care for myself
- I am not being provided with adequate food/nutrition
- I have no routine which is impacting on my sleep
- My emotional support needs are not being met
- I present with sexualised behaviour that is not appropriate for my age
- I have been exposed to suicide in my family network
- I regularly use drugs and/or alcohol
- I am experiencing repeated online risks, exposure to harmful content or other online harms that may be affecting my wellbeing and safety.

Education and Training

- I am missing school frequently
- I have received multiple suspensions and/or have been permanently excluded
- I have limited access to toys and stimulation through play
- I am a struggling to cope with everyday life
- I am reluctant to leave school at the end of the day to return home
- I have experienced several school changes
- I am experiencing a serious lack of appropriate stimulation and opportunities to meet my full potential
- My elective home education is not providing me sufficient education or meeting standards

Family and environment

- I experience poor routines and appropriate boundaries and am exposed to unsafe situations
- My parents have mental health needs which is impacting on their capacity to meet my needs
- My parents have been offered support to help improve things for me but they do not want services to be involved with our family but my situation is potentially harmful

- I experience poor supervision and care arrangements
- I am exposed to repeated incidents of domestic abuse and many incidents of my parents fighting
- My family have financial difficulties that prevent them meeting my basic care needs
- My parents are frequently misusing substances, which is impacting on their ability to meet my needs
- My parents have a learning disability that impacts on their care of me
- Our family is imminently at risk of homelessness

Social relationships/ engagement

- I struggle to regulate my emotions and this impacts me and others every day
- I am going missing from home regularly and often for long periods
- I am becoming known to the Police or my friends are involved with the Police and I am getting involved with risky, unsafe situations
- Our family is at risk of serious harassment from members of our community
- My family frequently move home and this impacts on my stability and wellbeing



Specialist need

Children and families have needs which cannot be met through early help or targeted services and require specialist support from a statutory agency. This applies where there is 'reasonable cause' to suspect a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm as defined by the Children Act 1989'. This also includes concerns relating to 'harmful practices' such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation or risk external to the family home.

Health and wellbeing

- I am suffering with developmental delay because my needs are not being met by my parents/carers
- I have significant health and/or dental needs which are not being met and are therefore impacting on my wellbeing or development.
- I have serious and complex mental health needs/behaviours where there is risk to self or others
- I am significantly under/ overweight
- I am often hungry, tired and my hygiene needs are not being met
- I am a child who is at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM)
- I am being subjected to physical, emotional or sexual abuse, and/or neglect
- I'm a baby and can't move on my own but I have unexplained bruises or marks
- My parents/carers make me ill on purpose or pretend I'm ill
- I am an unborn child, and the pregnancy is being concealed or my parents' engagement with care is sporadic
- I'm under 16 and pregnant and my family is not supportive or unaware
- I am an unborn child and my parents' are using alcohol/ substances which will likely impact on my wellbeing
- I am ignored and my voice is not heard, meaning I lack confidence and have poor self-esteem
- I use alcohol or drugs to help me cope, this impacts on my health and safety
- I am experiencing significant online harm, exploitation or abuse

Education and training

- I don't go to school because my parents don't send me
- I have restricted opportunities to be mobile and learn, e.g. I am strapped in a pram or car seat for long periods of time
- I do not go to school due to being called names because I smell, and my clothes aren't clean.
- My parents keep me at home to take care of other family members
- My persistent non-attendance at school may be seriously impairing my educational development and ability to meet my full potential

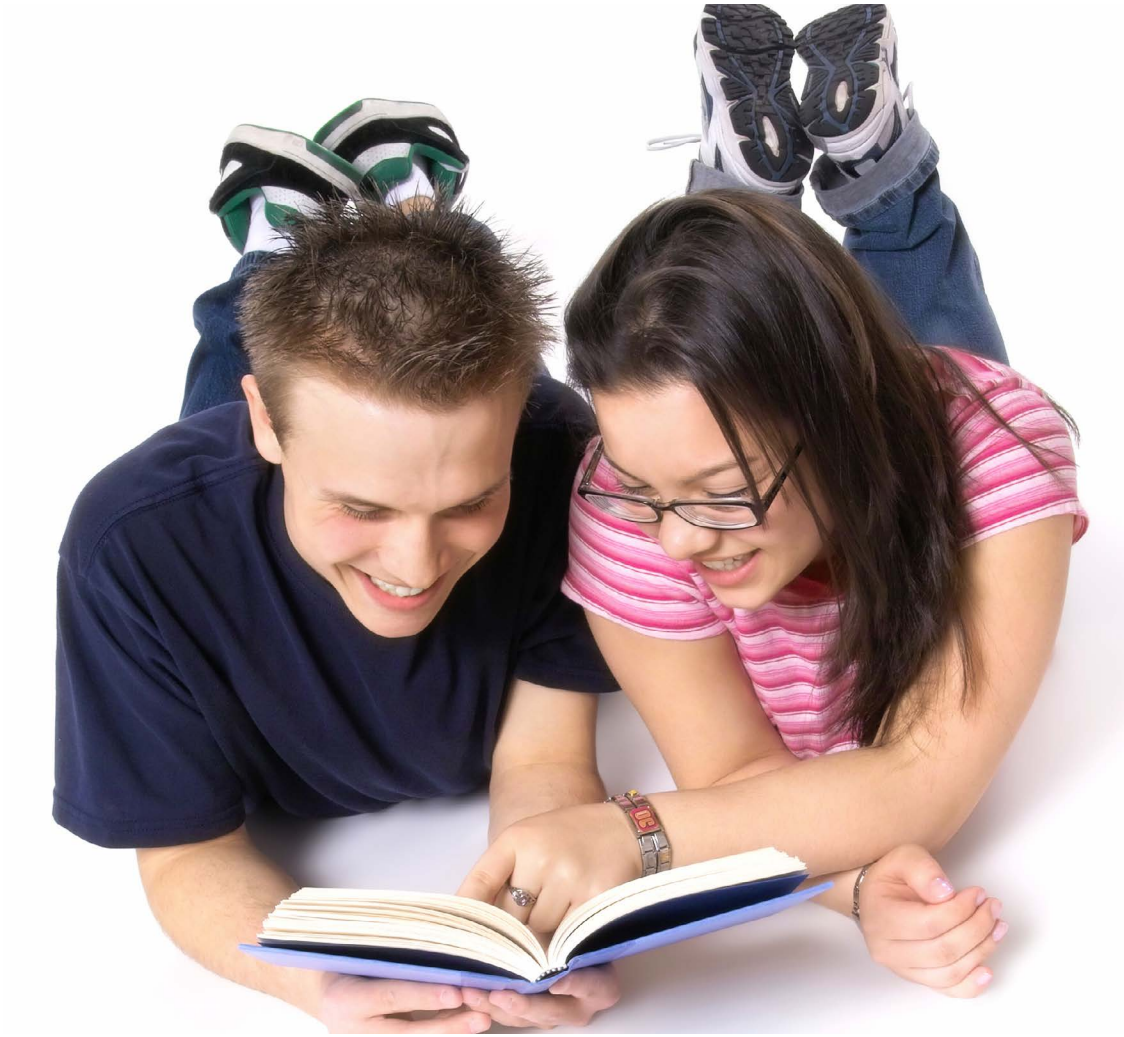
Family and environment

- My parents/carers have been prosecuted by Court for violent/ sexual offences
- I am an unborn child whose parents have previously had children removed from their care
- I am living in a home where a person who is identified as a person who poses a risk to children also lives or visits
- My parents have significant mental health difficulties, and they cannot meet my needs, which is impacting on my health, development and safety
- My parents are not attending their appointments to get help with their problems, which significantly impacts on their care of me

- I am a child who is being exposed to frequent and serious domestic abuse and or violence between my care givers
- My family has no recourse to public funding
- I am an unaccompanied asylum seeker child
- I'm under 16 and live with someone who isn't my close family as part of a private arrangement
- My parents have a learning disability that significantly impacts on their care of me
- I am a child who is at risk of forced marriage or 'honour' based abuse by my family members
- My parents are persistent substance misusers, and they cannot meet my needs, which is impacting on my health, development and safety

Social relationships/ engagement

- I struggle to regulate and manage my emotions, and this is making things more dangerous for me
- I'm being abused by other children
- I'm abusing other children
- People around me, whether at school, online, or in my neighbourhood, are putting me at risk
- I am spending time with people who are forcing me to do things that are harmful to me
- I am a child who is at risk of harm from sexual/criminal exploitation/ radicalisation
- I'm away from home for long periods, and my family often doesn't know where I am or report me missing
- My inability to manage by emotions means the police are getting to know me more
- There are problems in my community, and people have made threats against me and my family
- I am a child who is regularly in contact with the Police



Further useful resources

Plymouth Online Directory
www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com

Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership
www.plymouthscb.co.uk

Working Together to Safeguard Children
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/

South West Child Protection Procedures
https://swcpp-plymouth.trixonline.co.uk/

PLYMOUTH SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

www.plymouthscb.co.uk