

Knowledge Bite

Safeguarding Connected Children

The safeguarding policy audit in November 2020 overwhelmingly found strong safeguarding practice across the country, with children remaining at the heart of the work. The quality of safeguarding and risk assessments was good, with generally clear rationales for making referrals. 91% of referrals were deemed appropriate which demonstrates that there is a good understanding of thresholds of risk across the organisation, and practitioners are identifying when safeguarding referrals are required as set out in the safeguarding policy.

A key learning point from the audit was in relation to safeguarding children in the family who are not subject of proceedings. Previously referred to as 'non-subject children', in line with wider thinking about the importance of language, and to recognise that children would not want to be described as 'non-subject', the language has changed to 'connected children'.

27% of the cases
in the sample
required a referral
for a connected
child

From the 27 cases
in which a
connected child
referral was
needed, a referral
was only made in
17 cases (63%)

What does Cafcass' Safeguarding Policy say?

The practitioner should make a referral under section 47 to local authority children's services where s/he believes that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

The practitioner should refer under section 17 if the child is considered in need of support or services to safeguard and promote their welfare. Consideration for a referral applies to:

- All children with whom practitioners come into contact through their work, not just those who are subject to court proceeding
- All types of risk of significant harm to children, including any current risk of self-harm or suicide
- All children, regardless of whether they are open to Children's Social Care already and even if they are already the subject of Child Protection plans.

Remember – we have a safeguarding duty to ALL children.

In all contact with families, we need to be mindful of any connected children who may also be at risk, and continuously review their safety upon receipt of all new information.



“I’m not seeing my daddy now. I got scared when I saw him and his girlfriend, Rosie, fight. Rosie has a baby called Molly and I miss having cuddles with her. I’m worried about baby Molly getting hurt when they fight”.

Children may worry about the safety and welfare of other children in their family. Have you asked them about other children in their family? Do they have any worries about them?

The Family Justice Young People’s Board top tips for working with brothers and sisters include:

Consider the relationships for children and young people with brother(s) and/or sister(s) who are not involved in the court proceedings and the potential impact upon these relationships of the decisions made by the court.

Explain what the impact of the decision made will have not only on the children who are subject to the proceedings, but on all of their brothers and sisters too – what will happen going forward?

Children need to be reassured that the other children in their family are safe.

Ask yourself - How do you find out about other children in the family?

Professional curiosity

Clear recording

Continuous assessment



Professional curiosity

- Do any other children live in your home? Do any other children visit your home regularly? Does your partner have any children? Do you live with any younger relatives such as your own brothers or sisters?
- A parent may choose not to disclose that they spend time with other children for various reasons; is the other parent aware of them spending regular time with any other children?
- In public law, avoid assumptions that the local authority will already be aware of the presence of connected children. Confirm this with the social worker to ensure that they are safeguarded.



Professional curiosity

- Is there any reference to connected children in the application? Ensure that this is followed up with the parents to confirm their whereabouts, relationship to the subject child, and current arrangements.
- It can be difficult to obtain connected children's details after safeguarding issues have come to light and a referral is needed. During the EIT process this information should be gathered and recorded; it needs to be clarified in the WAFH process to check if anything has changed since the safeguarding interviews.

Clear recording

- Even if no significant risk issues are identified, the children's record needs to clearly highlight the presence of any connected children so that their safety is considered upon receipt of any new information. This should be highlighted on the contact log and case plan.
- Clearly recording connected children's details (name, DOB and address as a minimum) can avoid delay in making a safeguarding referral if this becomes necessary.
- Highlight any connected children in the case plan to ensure that upon transfer to the WAFH team, the safety of any connected children is considered as the assessment progresses.
- Management reviews and situational supervision need to address the safety of any connected children.
- Consider adding a 'connected child/ren' heading to any templates that you use such as for case reviews or interviewing.

Caution should be applied to including any information about connected children in reports. Information about connected children should only be included where it is relevant to the issues in the case. Any information included about connected children should be minimal and names should not be included where this is unnecessary.

Assessment is a continuous process

- Upon receipt of all new information, reassess risk to both the subject and any connected children.
- Ask yourself 'how is the connected child safe? If there is insufficient evidence to confirm their safety, what action needs to be taken?'
- Evidence your thinking about all children's safety on the child's record.



Don't forget about us!

Sometimes connected children are mentioned at the beginning of a case, but there is no mention of these children as the assessment progresses. Effectively they become lost.

- Remember to review the safety of connected children as the case progresses.
- Ask yourself, if the case was suddenly reallocated would it be obvious from the child's record that there are connected children who the new practitioner needs to be mindful of?
- Highlight any connected children in the case plan and contact log to ensure that they are not forgotten about when they case is reallocated, transferred to another team, or is reopened.

Making a connected child safeguarding referral



- Where a safeguarding referral is made for a child who is not the subject of proceedings (private or public law) the local team will add the child as a connected child to the case record, using the '[non-case related child safeguarding enquires/referrals](#)' guidance available on the intranet and the referral should be stored under the risk and safety folder within the case record.
- The process for making the referral is the same as that for subject children (see [Safeguarding Policy – section 7.1](#) for details)
- Our responsibility doesn't end once the referral is made. If the local authority response is not adequate to keep the connected child/ren safe, the escalation process should be followed in the same way as for children subject of the proceedings.
- See the Cafcass [Safeguarding Policy – section 8](#) for full details of the escalation process.



Case example for team discussions

Work to First Hearing (WTFH)

Mr Alan makes an application for a Child Arrangements Order to spend time with his two children. In his application he reports the mother has fabricated allegations of domestic abuse about him and won't allow the children to spend time with him.

Q. What needs to happen at the WTFH stage to ensure any connected children are safeguarded?

During the safeguarding interview, Mr Alan reports he regularly spends time with his son, Tom, including overnight stays. Tom is not subject of the proceedings.

Q. Are there any further steps that need to be taken to ensure the safety of Tom at this stage? What steps may you need to take?

Tom's details are obtained from Mr Alan. The FCA discusses the potential risks to Tom arising from the allegations of domestic abuse with his Practice Supervisor and it is agreed a safeguarding referral is not required at this stage and defensible decision-making is recorded on the contact log in relation to Tom. The case is then listed for a finding of fact hearing and closed.

Q. At the point of the case being closed, is there anything further you do in respect of Tom? Would you have done anything differently if the case was to remain open for a section 7 report prior to it being transferred to the WAFH team?



Case example for team discussions

Work After First Hearing (WAFH)

Following findings being made in relation to Mr Alan having perpetrated domestic abuse against the subject children's mother and having significant mental health difficulties, a section 7 is directed and the case re-opened.

Q. At the point the case is re-opened what needs to be considered?

During the interview for the section 7 report the mother of the subject children reports significant domestic abuse and the children appear to be displaying behaviours associated with trauma.

Q. Is there anything you need to do in relation to Tom? How can you ensure Tom's safety is considered at the case review and planning stage? How can you ensure Tom's safety remains under consideration if there are any changes in the safeguarding information, for example, further incidents of domestic abuse, decline in parental mental health, disclosures of abuse from the subject children?





Questions for team discussions:

- How do you find out about connected children?
- How can you ensure that risks to connected children are reviewed upon receipt of all new information?
- How do you evidence that connected children are safe?
- Is there anything that you will do differently?