

Oxford Unbounded Safeguarding Policy 2026-2027

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Safeguarding Roles for the Oxford Unbounded Safeguarding Policy

The Oxford Unbounded Safeguarding Policy makes reference to the following roles.
For 2026-2027, the people listed below will fulfil these roles.

Oxford Unbounded

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) Oliver Hedges
(May 2026 – May 2027)

Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL) James Munro

DSL/DDSL Email: outreach@maths.ox.ac.uk
DSL/DDSL Phone: +44 (0)1865 273525 (Office hours 09:00-17:00 Mon-Fri)
Please ask for the Outreach team when ringing.

University of Oxford

University Safeguarding Officer - Dr Markos Koumaditis director.hr@admin.ox.ac.uk
(University's Director of HR) +44 1865 270122

University Safeguarding Officer - Jane Harris & Kathy Noren director.swss@admin.ox.ac.uk
(Co-Directors of Student Welfare and Support Services) +44 1865 270122

Other Safeguarding Contacts

If you think a child is in **immediate danger**, call the police on **999**.

Oxfordshire Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) 0345 050 7666
0800 833408 (out of hours)

Oxfordshire Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) 01865 810603

NSPCC Helpline 0808 8005000 (10:00-16:00)
help@nspcc.org.uk (24hrs)

Oxford Unbounded Safeguarding Policy

In this policy, the phrase “Oxford Unbounded Staff” applies to members of the Outreach Team at the Mathematical Institute, University of Oxford. The phrase “Oxford Unbounded Mentor” applies to undergraduate and postgraduate students working as mentors on the programme.

The scope of this policy is to keep safe all children, young people or adults at risk with whom Oxford Unbounded has contact in the course of its work. It is also to provide guidance to all staff and mentors about the appropriate ways of working to ensure this obligation is fulfilled.

Throughout the policy “child” refers to “child, young person or even an adult at risk”. An “adult at risk” could be anyone depending upon their circumstances so our duty of care extends to all whom we work.

Safeguarding Policy and Commitment

Keeping children and vulnerable people safe is everyone’s responsibility. In all aspects of Oxford Unbounded activities, the needs and interests of children and vulnerable groups must be put first. In adopting this policy Oxford Unbounded commits to the following basic rights of the child, young person or adult at risk:

- to be given the support required to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve through learning
- to have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation
- to expect the support of all adults in their needs for care and protection from harm or abuse
- to be able to study without fear of abuse, harm or neglect

To meet this commitment Oxford Unbounded will:

- respect and promote the rights, wishes and feelings of children, young people or adults at risk
- require staff and mentors to adopt the policy outlined in this document
- provide training for all staff and mentors in safeguarding
- implement and promote appropriate procedures to safeguard the well-being of children and adults at risk and protect them from abuse
- ensure risks are assessed for all its activities
- use safe practices to recruit staff and mentors, induct them to their role, and help them carry out their duties safely including training its staff and mentors to adopt good practice to safeguard and protect children and adults at risk
- ensure staff and mentors know how to report any alleged malpractice
- respond to any allegations of misconduct or abuse of a child, young person or adult at risk in line with this policy as well as implementing, where appropriate, the relevant disciplinary and appeals procedures
- monitor, review, evaluate and revise (where necessary) this policy:
 - in line with legislative requirements
 - after an issue relating to the application of the policy
 - or otherwise annually

Child Protection

[Working Together to Safeguard Children \(Dec 2023\)](#) defines child protection as:

“Part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. This refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm.”

Reporting a Concern

If you think a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999.

Oxford Unbounded has a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), who will coordinate the organisational response in the case of:

- a child, young person or adult at risk being identified as being at risk of abuse or neglect
- a person reporting to a member of Oxford Unbounded staff or mentor that they have been abused or are suffering neglect
- an allegation of abuse made against a member of Oxford Unbounded staff or mentor.

All initial reports received should be made to the DSL or, if the DSL is unavailable, to the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL).

A report should be made by a member of staff or mentor as soon as they become concerned – do not wait for confirmation of the suspicions and do not undertake any investigation yourself.

On receiving a report, the DSL will work with the University of Oxford Safeguarding Officer(s) and other Oxford Unbounded staff as appropriate, to coordinate the organisational response to the reported information. This is likely to include liaison with statutory and external agencies such as:

- the person’s school or college
- local authority children’s services
- the NSPCC
- the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)
- the police

The DSL will ensure that the initial response is made within 48 hours and will keep appropriate written notes throughout the process.

The Role of the Designated Safeguarding Lead

The role of the designated person(s) is to:

- know which outside agency (police, social services, health services) to contact in the event of a child protection concern coming to the notice of Oxford Unbounded;

- ensure that appropriate information is available at the time of referral and that the referral is confirmed in writing under confidential cover;
- liaise with schools, police, local social services and health services and other agencies as appropriate;
- keep and update a record of DSLs at schools working with Oxford Unbounded
- keep relevant people within Oxford Unbounded informed about any action taken and any further action required;
- ensure that a proper record is kept of any referral and action taken, and that this is kept safely and in confidence;
- provide information and advice on child protection within Oxford Unbounded;
- review the operation of the child protection policy regularly to ensure the procedures are working and that it complies with current best practice.

Allegations of Abuse

Oxford Unbounded advises that staff and mentors follow the [NSPCC guidance](#) on receiving an allegation of abuse.

This states:

- **Listen carefully to what they're saying**
Be patient and focus on what you're being told. Try not to express your own views and feelings. If you appear shocked or as if you don't believe them it could make them stop talking and take back what they've said.
- **Give them the tools to talk**
If they're struggling to talk to you, show them [Childline's letter builder tool](#). It uses simple prompts to help them share what's happening and how they're feeling.
- **Let them know they've done the right thing by telling you**
Reassurance can make a big impact. If they've kept the abuse a secret it can have a big impact knowing they've shared what's happened.
- **Tell them it's not their fault**
Abuse is never a child's fault. It's important they hear, and know, this.
- **Say you'll take them seriously**
They may have kept the abuse secret because they were scared they wouldn't be believed. Make sure they know they can trust you and you'll listen and support them.
- **Don't confront the alleged abuser**
Confronting the alleged abuser could make the situation worse for the child.
- **Explain what you'll do next**
For younger children, explain you're going to speak to someone who will be able to help. For older children, explain you'll need to report the abuse to someone who can help.
- **Report what the child has told you as soon as possible**

Report as soon after you've been told about the abuse so the details are fresh in your mind and action can be taken quickly. It can be helpful to take notes as soon after you've spoken to the child. Try to keep these as accurate as possible.

- **Remember** that those who abuse can be of any age (even other children), gender or ethnic background, and it is important not to allow personal preconceptions about people to prevent appropriate action taking place. Potential victims should be taken seriously, kept safe and never be made to feel like they are creating a problem for reporting abuse, sexual violence or sexual harassment.

As soon as practically possible after the disclosure the member of staff or mentor should make written notes on the Record of Safeguarding Concern Form (**Appendix 1**) including:

- the date, time and location;
- what the child said and did;
- any questions asked of the child and their responses.

The written notes should be passed immediately to the DSL.

It is vital that at no point the member of staff or mentor receiving the report promises or implies that they will keep the information provided completely confidential. Explain that it might be necessary to share the information with a colleague in order to ensure the child reporting the abuse is protected.

A member of staff or mentor who has any queries relating to Safeguarding and Child Protection procedures at Oxford Unbounded should seek guidance from the DSL. They should also seek guidance if they are worried about a child's behaviour, even if the child has not disclosed. Staff and mentors should be aware that children may not feel ready or know how to tell someone that they are being abused, exploited, or neglected, and/or they may not recognise their experiences as harmful. For example, children may feel embarrassed, humiliated, or threatened. This could be due to their vulnerability, disability and/or sexual orientation or language barriers. This should not prevent staff or mentors from having a professional curiosity and speaking to the DSL.

Recognising Abuse

All staff and mentors should be able to identify the signs of abuse and the impact of abuse and neglect upon children's welfare. Guidance is available on the [NSPCC website](#) and in Appendix 5. Further reading is suggested in Appendix 6.

All new staff and mentors will be provided with training as part of their induction process. The DSL and DDSL will renew Level 3 Designated Lead training every 2 years. All other staff and mentors will renew Level 2 Generalist training every 3 years. All staff and mentors will receive refresher training annually.

Whistleblowing Code of Practice

Concerns about Oxford Unbounded staff or mentors

If a member of Oxford Unbounded staff or mentor has concerns about the conduct of another member of staff or mentor, this should be reported to the DSL who will pass on concerns to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and the University of Oxford Safeguarding Officer (Student Welfare and Support Services). Contact details can be found in the Safeguarding Roles section.

Concerns about the DSL or the Deputy DSL

If a member of Oxford Unbounded staff or mentor has concerns about the conduct of the DSL (or the deputy DSL) or if the DSL (or the deputy DSL) is the subject of the report then this should be reported to the University of Oxford Safeguarding Officer (University's Director of HR) following the same procedures as outlined above.

Oxford Unbounded Staff and Mentor Responsibilities

Keeping up to date

All staff and mentors should read the most recent version of the Oxford Unbounded Safeguarding policy on an annual basis and participate in annual training. They should also read Part 1 (or the condensed version in annex A for those who do not have much direct contact with children) of [Keeping children safe in education](#) which is also updated annually. Those staff supervising and organising staff and mentors working with students should also read annex E.

Risk Assessments

When arranging face-to-face events involving students a risk assessment should be completed by Oxford Unbounded staff. For events with another organisation such as an Oxford College, risk assessment procedures should be considered and agreed jointly. For online mentoring, standard procedures are in place to ensure the safety of students and mentors (Appendix 2).

Online events

Guidance has been written for staff and mentors running online events, particularly with students during periods of school closures and at other times. This is available in Appendix 2, 3, and 4.

Staff Conduct and Safer Recruitment

A Staff and Mentor Code of Conduct (Appendix 3) sets out the guidelines that Oxford Unbounded follows in working with children and more generally. All staff and mentors are enhanced DBS checked and complete Level 2: General Safeguarding training from the [Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership \(OSCP\)](#) in line with [University policy](#). The DSL and DDSL complete Level 3: Designated Safeguarding Lead training. Oxford Unbounded has procedures in place both for handling any allegations made against its staff or mentors and for keeping records related to any allegations.

Social media, photography and other communications

Oxford Unbounded defines social media to be ‘a type of interactive online medium that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum’. This definition does not include online learning platforms used by Oxford Unbounded for student mentoring. Oxford Unbounded staff and mentors should not initiate or accept any type of communication, such as friend requests, via personal social media from students. This does not preclude students from “following” official Oxford Mathematics social media accounts where there is no one-to-one communication.

Forms of direct messaging included on online learning platforms used by Oxford Unbounded for student mentoring will be disabled where possible. Email correspondences from a child will be directed to and replied from an email inbox shared by all Oxford Unbounded staff.

Staff should only use a designated work telephone number as a contact number for communications with others including when organising events and this should not be a number used for personal contacts.

Safeguarding Adults

Oxford Unbounded has a duty of care that extends to adults as well as children with whom we work. Various legislation sets out the obligation to safeguard adults including Human Rights Act 1998, Care Act 2014, Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulations.

The NSPCC and others define “adults at risk” as being:

- Those with disabilities (seen and unseen) and special needs
- Those who have been in the care system
- Those who are dealing with additional stress
- Those who have experienced an upsetting event
- Victims of abuse

As we won’t know who falls into these categories, we should treat everyone as though they could be or could become “at risk”.

Supporting Mentors

The role of Oxford Unbounded staff is to help prevent mentors becoming at risk, by assisting them in meeting their needs and to be vigilant in recognising when they might be at risk.

In order to do this, staff should:

- Be aware of reactions to comments and situations
- Be vigilant for the person who withdraws
- Explicitly create an atmosphere of safety
- Be aware of signs and symptoms of abuse (as we do for children)
- Be aware of any unexpected absences or mentors who leave suddenly without communicating their departure
- Be aware of any additional needs of mentors, such as medical conditions or learning difficulties, and make provision for these where possible.

Mentors should be asked if they wish to voluntarily disclose any:

- medical conditions
- dietary requirements
- access requirements
- learning needs.

Appendix 1: Record of Safeguarding Concern Form

Private and Confidential

Reference number:

Record of Safeguarding Concern / Incident Report

This form is designed to report any safeguarding incidents or concerns. It should be completed by the person who has heard the allegation, who witnessed the incident, was most directly involved or who provided first aid if relevant.

Date:		Name and role of person completing the form:	
Which event does the concern relate to:		Contact details of person completing the form:	

Details of child, young person, or adult at risk:

Name:		Address:	
Contact Number:		Gender:	
Date of Birth:		Local Authority:	
Any further information that may be considered useful:			

Parent/carer/school contact details (if known – please give as much information or indications as you are aware of):

Name:		Address:	
Contact Number:		Gender:	



Have parent(s)/ carer(s)/ school DSL been notified of the incident?	Yes / No	If yes, please provide details:	
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Incident Details:

Date/Time:		Group name (if applicable):	
Location of incident:			
<p>Description of the incident or concern: <i>Include relevant information such as what happened and how it happened, description of any injuries sustained, behaviour witnessed and whether the information provided is being recorded as fact, opinion or hearsay. Continue on separate sheet(s) if necessary, including the reference number.</i></p>			
<p>Details of any previous concerns, incidents or relevant safeguarding records:</p>			
<p>Child, young person or adult at risk account of the incident or concern: <i>Use their own words.</i></p>			
<p>Details of any witnesses:</p>			



Action taken by the person completing the form:

--

Reporting to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) section: (to be completed by DSL)

Date & time DSL notified of incident/concern:

--

Date & time this form passed on to DSL (if different from above):

--

DSL comments:

(e.g. actions taken / impact on rest of programme / external agency involvement / initial lessons learned / follow-up actions required)

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Signed by DSL:

Name:

Date:

Role:

Follow up action required:

Action:

Due date:

Person responsible:

Action:	Due date:	Person responsible:

Appendix 2: Online Mentoring of Students

The following principles should be observed

- Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
- Everyone in the classroom should be identifiable and records of attendance kept.
- Everyone needs to understand the expected behaviours and how to report any transgressions.
- Every mentoring session should be recorded for safeguarding and quality assurance purposes.
- Communication with students prior to and after the lesson should ideally be via Canvas. Oxford Unbounded staff emailing students should use the shared email account for all Oxford Unbounded Staff.
- All mentor and staff engaged in online sessions must have an enhanced DBS check and have undertaken safeguarding training.

Guidance for Mentors

- All communication between participants must be through the platforms provided by the programme.
- Only attend sessions via your own log-in details.
- Do not share links to the programme's learning platforms.
- Do not share course materials with people outside the programme.
- Do not allow others access to your accounts relating to the programme.
- Keep your camera turned on during mentoring sessions. You may temporarily turn off your camera and microphone if necessary.
- Use the waiting room to check students' identities before admitting them to the meeting. Do not admit an unknown participant.
- Students are expected to keep their camera turned on during mentoring sessions. Mentors should prompt students to do so in order to identify participants. Clarify with students the ground rules such as making sure that they are suitably dressed and in an appropriate environment. Students also may temporarily turn off their camera and microphone occasionally if they need to.
- Dress appropriately and use respectful language at all times.
- Ensure the background of your video is appropriate.
- Do not share, link to, or display any materials or content that others might find inappropriate, including in the background of the video or audio feed.
- Inform all members of your household when an online session is taking place and ask them not to behave or dress in a manner that others may find inappropriate, especially if they can be seen or heard in the background.
- Do not take and/or share any pictures or recordings of the session(s). (This does not include the official recording which will only be accessed by Oxford Unbounded staff for safeguarding and quality assurance purposes.)

- Contact the Oxford Unbounded staff if there are any concerns about anything anyone is saying or doing.
- Be aware that sessions are recorded for use only within Oxford Unbounded for safeguarding and quality assurance purposes.

Rules for students

- Do not share your password or use any other person's username or password or attempt to attend an online session that you are not invited to attend.
- Join online mentoring sessions using your own first name (or preferred name if provided) and last initial e.g. *John S.*
- Try to join the mentoring session from a suitable location to minimise distraction and disruption.
- Make sure the background of your video is appropriate.
- Dress appropriately and use respectful language at all times.
- Follow the guidance given by your mentor or Oxford Unbounded staff.
- Be polite and responsible when communicating with others.
- Come to the mentoring session prepared and ready to engage.
- Do not record or take pictures/screenshots during an online session.
- Contact the Oxford Unbounded staff if there are any concerns about anything anyone is saying or doing.
- Observe your school or college's cyber safety guidelines to keep safe online.

Appendix 3: Staff and Mentor Code of Conduct (Online)

- **Do** remember that you are a role model at ALL times.
- **Do** treat everyone with dignity and respect.
- **Do** treat all students equally – do not show favouritism.
- **Do** make sure all online communication is within a group and age appropriate. There must be no private online communication between a mentor and a student. All mentoring sessions must be recorded and communication outside of the sessions must be through Canvas.
- **Do** encourage an open and transparent culture.
- **Do** allow students to talk about any concerns they may have, including any attitudes or behaviours they do not like or feel comfortable with.
- **Do** respect a student’s right to personal privacy.
- **Do** act within the boundaries of your role – even in difficult circumstances. Always remember that you are in a position of responsibility and are not the students’ friend.
- **Do** remember that someone else may misinterpret your actions, even if you mean well.
- **Do** take concerns about the safety and wellbeing of young people seriously and pass them onto a staff member immediately.

- **Do not** allow activities or games which encourage bullying behaviour including initiation ceremonies, dares, or forfeits.
- **Do not** use inappropriate, suggestive or threatening language when communicating with students.
- **Do not** engage with any inappropriate attention seeking behaviour, for example flirting and tantrums.
- **Do not** engage in friendships or relationships with students.
- **Do not** share personal contact information such as telephone numbers or addresses with students.
- **Do not** add or interact with students on social media platforms, including LinkedIn.
- **Do not** record or take photo/screenshots during the online sessions. (This does not include the official recording for safeguarding purposes.)
- **Do not** drink alcohol or smoke/vape while on duty.
- **Do not** trivialise abuse or let it go unreported.

Appendix 4: Student Code of Conduct (Online)

- **Do** try to participate fully in all aspects of the programme, including engaging with the pre-session content provided.
- **Do** let Oxford Unbounded know as soon as possible if you cannot attend a session due to illness or another commitment.
- **Do** submit your own work and **don't** use generative AI tools. The mentors will be better prepared to support you if they can see what you do and don't understand.
- **Do** treat everyone with respect and be inclusive.
- **Do** use appropriate language at all times.
- **Do** contact Oxford Unbounded staff if you feel uncomfortable about anything anyone is saying or doing. You can email outreach@maths.ox.ac.uk.
- **Do** follow the guidance given by your mentor or Oxford Unbounded staff.
- **Do** dress appropriately and be aware of your surroundings during online mentoring calls. Ensure the background is appropriate and try to find a space where you won't be distracted.

- **Don't** share any personal details within the Oxford Unbounded online sessions or on Canvas – this includes contact details and social media or other online account names/handles.
- **Don't** try to connect with mentors or Oxford Unbounded staff outside of the programme, for example on social media or via personal e-mail addresses. Only communicate via the platforms provided by the programme.
- **Don't** take photos, screenshots, or recordings of the online session.
- **Don't** share, link to, or display any inappropriate materials or content.
- **Don't** share links to the programme's mentoring sessions or electronic platforms or allow others to access your accounts.

- **I understand that** sessions will be recorded for safeguarding and quality assurance purposes only. The recordings will not be accessed by other participants on the programme.
- **I understand that** Oxford Unbounded will not tolerate any bullying, harassment, or discriminatory behaviour.
- **I understand that** if I do not follow these guidelines, Oxford Unbounded may contact my parents/carers and teacher and I may be removed from the Oxford Unbounded programme.

Appendix 5: Recognising 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. 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.

Listed below are different forms of abuse along with signs of identification. More is available on the [NSPCC website](#).

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people in a relationship. But it isn't 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.

Domestic abuse can seriously harm children and young people. Witnessing domestic abuse is child abuse, and teenagers can suffer domestic abuse in their relationships.

It's often difficult to tell if domestic abuse is happening, because it usually takes place in the family home and abusers can act very differently when other people are around.

Children who witness domestic abuse may:

- become aggressive
- display anti-social behaviour
- suffer from depression or anxiety
- not do as well at school - due to difficulties at home or disruption of moving to and from refuges.

Things you may notice include being withdrawn suddenly, behaving differently, being anxious, clingy, depressed or aggressive.

Sexual Abuse

A child is sexually abused when they are forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities. This doesn't have to be physical contact and it can happen online. Sometimes the child won't understand that what's happening to them is abuse.

They may not even understand that it's wrong. Or they may be afraid to speak out.

Children who are sexually abused may:

- stay away from certain people
- avoid being alone with people, such as family members or friends
- seem frightened of a person or reluctant to socialise with them.
- show sexual behaviour that's inappropriate for their age
- become sexually active at a young age or promiscuous
- use sexual language or know information that you wouldn't expect them to.
- have physical symptoms such as soreness, an STD or pregnancy.

Neglect

Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs and is the most common form of child abuse. 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 the love, care and attention they need from their parents. 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.

There are 4 types of neglect:

Physical neglect- Failing to provide for a child's basic needs such as food, clothing or shelter. Failing to adequately supervise a child, or provide for their safety.

Educational neglect- Failing to ensure a child receives an education.

Emotional neglect- Failing to meet a child's needs for nurture and stimulation, perhaps by ignoring, humiliating, intimidating or isolating them. It's often the most difficult to prove.

Medical neglect- Failing to provide appropriate health care, including dental care and refusal of care or ignoring medical recommendations.

Neglect can be really difficult to identify, making it hard for professionals to take early action to protect a child. Having one of the signs or symptoms below doesn't necessarily mean that a child is being neglected. But if you notice multiple, or persistent, signs then it could indicate there's a serious problem:

- Poor appearance and hygiene. They may:
 - be smelly or dirty
 - have unwashed clothes
 - have inadequate clothing, e.g. not having a winter coat
 - seem hungry or turn up to school without having breakfast or any lunch money
- Health and development problems. They may have:
 - untreated injuries, medical and dental issues
 - repeated accidental injuries caused by lack of supervision
 - recurring illnesses or infections
 - not been given appropriate medicines
 - missed medical appointments such as vaccinations
 - poor muscle tone or prominent joints

- skin sores, rashes, flea bites, scabies or ringworm
- thin or swollen tummy
- anaemia
- tiredness
- faltering weight or growth and not reaching developmental milestones (known as failure to thrive)
- poor language, communication or social skills
- Housing and family issues. They may be:
 - living in an unsuitable home environment or not having any heating
 - left alone for a long time
 - taking on the role of carer for other family members.

Online abuse

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. Online abuse may be part of abuse that is taking place in the real world (for example bullying or grooming). Or it may be that the abuse only happens online (for example persuading children to take part in sexual activity online).

Children can feel like there is no escape from online abuse – abusers can contact them at any time of the day or night, the abuse can come into safe places like their bedrooms, and images and videos can be stored and shared with other people.

A child may be experiencing abuse online if they:

- spend lots, much more or much less time online, texting, gaming or using social media
- are withdrawn, upset or outraged after using the internet or texting
- are secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone
- have lots of new phone numbers, texts or e-mail addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet.

Physical abuse

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. Shaking or hitting babies can cause non-accidental head injuries (NAHI). Sometimes parents or carers will make up or cause the symptoms of illness in their child, perhaps giving them medicine they don't need and making the child unwell – this is known as fabricated or induced illness (FII).

Bumps and bruises don't necessarily mean a child is being physically abused – all children have accidents, trips and falls. There isn't one sign or symptom to look out for that will say a child is

definitely being physically abused. But if a child often has injuries, there seems to be a pattern, or the explanation doesn't match the injury then this should be investigated.

Physical signs include:

- Bruises
 - commonly on the head but also on the ear or neck or soft areas - the abdomen, back and buttocks
 - defensive wounds commonly on the forearm, upper arm, back of the leg, hands or feet
 - clusters of bruises on the upper arm, outside of the thigh or on the body
 - bruises with dots of blood under the skin
 - a bruised scalp and swollen eyes from hair being pulled violently
 - bruises in the shape of a hand or object.
- Burns or scalds
 - can be from hot liquids, hot objects, flames, chemicals or electricity
 - on the hands, back, shoulders or buttocks; scalds may be on lower limbs, both arms and/or both legs
 - a clear edge to the burn or scald
 - sometimes in the shape of an implement for example, a circular cigarette burn
 - multiple burns or scalds.
- Bite marks
 - usually oval or circular in shape
 - visible wounds, indentations or bruising from individual teeth.
- Fractures or broken bones
 - fractures to the ribs or the leg bones in babies
 - multiple fractures or breaks at different stages of healing
- Other injuries and health problems
 - scarring
 - effects of poisoning such as vomiting, drowsiness or seizures
 - respiratory problems from drowning, suffocation or poisoning

Emotional abuse

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. Emotional abuse can involve deliberately trying to scare or humiliate a child or isolating or ignoring them.

Children who are emotionally abused are often suffering another type of abuse or neglect at the same time – but this isn't always the case.

It can be difficult to recognise emotional abuse and children may not always realise they are experiencing it.

But there may be indicators in the way a child behaves and reacts to certain situations. Children who have been emotionally abused may:

- lack confidence and have low self-esteem
- be withdrawn and very quiet
- experience mental health issues
- have a language delay
- struggle to focus and concentrate on tasks
- struggle to make or maintain relationships
 - display behaviour perceived to be aggressive or hostile
 - seem isolated from their parents, carers and peers
 - lack social skills or have few, if any, friends.

Child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a type of sexual abuse. Children in exploitative situations and relationships receive something such as gifts, money or affection as a result of performing sexual activities or others performing sexual activities on them.

Children or young people may be tricked into believing they're in a loving, consensual relationship. They might be invited to parties and given drugs and alcohol. They may also be groomed and exploited online.

Some children and young people are trafficked into or within the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation can also happen to young people in gangs.

When sexual exploitation happens online, young people may be persuaded, or forced, to: send or post sexually explicit images of themselves; take part in sexual activities via a webcam or smartphone; have sexual conversations by text or online. Abusers may threaten to send images, video or copies of conversations to the young person's friends and family unless they take part in other sexual activity. Images or videos may continue to be shared long after the sexual abuse has stopped.

Sexual exploitation can be very difficult to identify. Warning signs can easily be mistaken for 'normal' teenage behaviour. Young people who are being sexually exploited may:

- go missing from home, care or education.
- be involved in abusive relationships, intimidated and fearful of certain people or situations
- hang out with groups of older people, or antisocial groups, or with other vulnerable peers
- associate with other young people involved in sexual exploitation
- get involved in gangs, gang fights, gang membership
- have older boyfriends or girlfriends
- spend time at places of concern, such as hotels or known brothels
- not know where they are, because they have been moved around the country
- be involved in petty crime such as shoplifting
- have unexplained physical injuries
- have a changed physical appearance, for example lost weight.

Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the partial or total removal of external female genitalia for nonmedical reasons. It is also known as female circumcision or cutting. Religious, social or cultural reasons are sometimes given for FGM. There are no medical reasons to carry out FGM. It does not enhance fertility or make childbirth safer. It is used to control female sexuality and can cause severe and long-lasting damage to physical and emotional health.

A girl at immediate risk of FGM may not know what is going to happen. But she might talk about or you may become aware of:

- a long holiday abroad or going 'home' to visit family
- relative or cutter visiting from abroad
- a special occasion or ceremony to 'become a woman' or get ready for marriage
- a female relative being cut – a sister, cousin, or an older female relative such as a mother or aunt.

Breast Ironing / Breast Flattening

Breast Ironing is the process whereby young pubescent girls' breasts are ironed, massaged and/or pounded down through the use of hard or heated objects in order to delay the development of the breasts or cause them to disappear entirely. A girl who is undergoing this process may:

- be embarrassed about her body
- refer to pain or discomfort in the chest area, without specifics

Bullying and Cyberbullying

Bullying is 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's usually repeated over a long period of time and can hurt a child both physically and emotionally.

Bullying that happens online, using social networks, games and mobile phones, is often called cyberbullying. A child can feel like there's no escape because it can happen wherever they are, at any time of day or night.

Bullying includes: verbal abuse, such as name calling and gossiping; non-verbal abuse, such as hand signs or text messages; emotional abuse, such as threatening, intimidating or humiliating someone; exclusion, such as ignoring or isolating someone; undermining, by constant criticism or spreading rumours; controlling or manipulating someone; racial, sexual or homophobic bullying; physical assaults, such as hitting and pushing; making silent, hoax or abusive calls; online or cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying includes: sending threatening or abusive text messages; creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos; 'trolling' - the sending of menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games; excluding children from online games, activities or friendship groups; setting up hate sites or groups about a particular child; encouraging young people to self-harm; voting for or against someone in an abusive poll; creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass a young person or cause trouble using their name; sending explicit

messages, also known as sexting; pressuring children into sending sexual images or engaging in sexual conversations.

It can be hard for adults to know whether or not a child is being bullied. A child might not tell anyone because they're scared the bullying will get worse. They might think that they deserve to be bullied, or that it's their fault. You can't always see the signs of bullying. And no one sign indicates for certain that a child is being bullied. But you should look out for:

- belongings getting "lost" or damaged
- physical injuries such as unexplained bruises
- being afraid to go to school, being mysteriously 'ill' each morning, or skipping school
- not doing as well at school
- asking for, or stealing, money (to give to a bully)
- being nervous, losing confidence, or becoming distressed and withdrawn
- problems with eating or sleeping
- bullying others.

Child trafficking

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, cooking
- forced labour in factories or agriculture
- criminal activity such as pickpocketing, begging, transporting drugs, working on cannabis farms, selling pirated DVDs and bag theft.

Signs that a child has been trafficked may not be obvious but you might notice unusual behaviour or events. These include a child who:

- spends a lot of time doing household chores
- rarely leaves their house, has no freedom of movement and no time for playing
- is orphaned or living apart from their family, often in unregulated private foster care
- lives in substandard accommodation
- isn't sure which country, city or town they're in
- is unable or reluctant to give details of accommodation or personal details
- might not be registered with a school or a GP practice
- has no documents or has falsified documents
- has no access to their parents or guardians
- is seen in inappropriate places such as brothels or factories
- possesses unaccounted for money or goods
- is permanently deprived of a large part of their earnings, required to earn a minimum amount of money every day or pay off an exorbitant debt
- has injuries from workplace accidents
- gives a prepared story which is very similar to stories given by other children.

Grooming

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 and young people can be groomed online or face-to-face, by a stranger or by someone they know - for example a family member, friend or professional.

Groomers may be male or female. They could be any age. Many children and young people don't understand that they have been groomed or that what has happened is abuse.

The signs of grooming aren't always obvious and groomers will often go to great lengths not to be identified. If a child is being groomed they may:

- be very secretive, including about what they are doing online
- have older boyfriends or girlfriends
- go to unusual places to meet friends
- have new things such as clothes or mobile phones that they can't or won't explain
- have access to drugs and alcohol.

Child on child abuse

All staff should be aware that children can abuse other children (often referred to as child-on-child abuse), and that it can happen both inside and outside of school or college and online. All staff should be clear as to the important role they have to play in preventing it and responding where they believe a child may be at risk from it.

Even if there are no reports it does not mean it is not happening, it may be the case that it is just not being reported. As such it is important if staff have any concerns regarding child-on-child abuse they should speak to their designated safeguarding lead (or deputy).

Staff should understand the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviours between children, many of which are listed below, that are abusive in nature. Downplaying certain behaviours, for example dismissing sexual harassment as “just banter”, “just having a laugh”, “part of growing up” or “boys being boys” can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours, an unsafe environment for children and in worst case scenarios a culture that normalises abuse leading to children accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it.

Child-on-child abuse is most likely to include, but may not be limited to:

- bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying)
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between children (sometimes known as ‘teenage relationship abuse’)
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages physical abuse)
- sexual violence, such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault; (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages sexual violence)

- sexual harassment, such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be standalone or part of a broader pattern of abuse
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party
- consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery)
- upskirting, which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without their permission, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress, or alarm, and initiation/hazing type violence and rituals (this could include activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element).

Non-recent abuse

Non-recent child abuse, sometimes called historical abuse, is when an adult was abused as a child. Sometimes adults who were abused in childhood blame themselves or are made to feel it's their fault. The person might have known that they were abused for a very long or only recently learnt or understood what had happened to them.

The effects can be short term but sometimes they last into adulthood. If someone has been abused as a child, it's more likely that they'll suffer abuse again. This is known as revictimisation.

The long-term effects of abuse and neglect can include:

- emotional difficulties like anger, anxiety, sadness or low self-esteem
- mental health problems like depression
- eating disorders,
- self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- problems with drugs or alcohol
- disturbing thoughts, emotions and memories
- poor physical health
- struggling with parenting or relationships.

If an adult was abused as a child, they deserve to be believed and to get support if they wish. [NAPAC](#) is the National Association for People Abused in Childhood. NAPAC's trained staff speak with survivors of any type of childhood abuse over the phone, exploring the options available to them such as support groups and counselling. They also support family members, friends and professionals who are helping someone who was abused, advising them on who else can help.

Criminal Exploitation

Criminal exploitation occurs when children and young people are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes. Often this is through a 'gang'. There are different types of gang and not every gang is criminal or dangerous. However, gang membership can be linked to illegal activity, particularly organised criminal gangs involved in trafficking, drug dealing and violent crime.

County Lines is the police term for urban gangs exploiting young people into moving drugs from a hub, normally a large city, into other markets - suburban areas and market and coastal towns - using dedicated mobile phone lines or “deal lines”. Children as young as 12 years old have been exploited into carrying drugs for gangs. This can involve children being trafficked away from their home area, staying in accommodation and selling and manufacturing drugs.

A child or young person might be recruited into a gang because of where they live or because of who their family is. They might join because they don’t see another option or because they feel like they need protection. Children and young people may become involved in gangs for many reasons, including peer pressure and wanting to fit in with their friends; feeling respected and important; being protected from other gangs, or bullies or they want to make money and are promised rewards.

A child is more at risk of exploitation if they have been excluded from school, have special educational needs or poor mental health. They also are vulnerable if they are already being abused, such as at home or live in an area where gangs are prevalent.

As children involved in gangs often commit crimes themselves, sometimes they aren’t seen as victims despite the harm they have experienced. It’s important to spot the signs and act quickly if you think a child is being groomed or is becoming involved with a gang. Signs include:

- Frequently absent from and doing badly in school.
- Going missing from home, staying out late and travelling for unexplained reasons.
- In a relationship or hanging out with someone older than them.
- Being angry, aggressive or violent.
- Being isolated or withdrawn.
- Having unexplained money and buying new things.
- Wearing clothes or accessories in gang colours or getting tattoos.
- Using new slang words.
- Spending more time on social media and being secretive about time online.
- Making more calls or sending more texts, possibly on a new phone or phones.
- Self-harming and feeling emotionally unwell.
- Taking drugs and abusing alcohol.
- Committing petty crimes like shop lifting or vandalism.
- Unexplained injuries and refusing to seek medical help.

Appendix 6: Recommended Reading and Relevant Guidance

Links to recommended reading and relevant guidance

- [Keeping children safe in education \(DfE 2025\)](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children \(DfE Dec 2023\)](#)
- [NSPCC Safeguarding Standards and Guidance](#)
- [Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership safeguarding procedures, guidance and resources](#)

Help and Support

- **SHOUT** - Text SHOUT to 85258 or visit www.giveusashout.org. Shout is a 24/7 UK crisis text service available for times when people feel they need immediate support.
- **The MIX** - Call the MIX on 0808 808 4994 or visit www.themix.org.uk. They offer support from mental health to money, break ups to drugs (under 25s).
- **Young Minds** - Visit the Young Minds website www.youngminds.org.uk, a UK charity committed to improving the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people (under 25s).
- **NAPAC** - National Association for People Abused in Childhood is a national charity offering support to adult survivors of all types of childhood abuse, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect; www.napac.org.uk Support line: 0808 801 0331
- **HAVOCA** - Help for Adult Victims of Child Abuse is run by survivors of child abuse. They provide support, friendship and advice for any adult whose life has been affected by childhood abuse; <https://www.havoca.org>