

The definitions of abuse used in this guidance are taken directly from the statutory guidance 'Working together to safeguard children' (2018, updated 2021).

Definition of physical abuse: 'a form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.'

Symptoms of physical abuse – what to look out for:

- Bruises, black eyes, broken bones.
- Unexplained or untreated injuries.
- Injuries to unusual body parts – thighs, back, abdomen.
- Bruising that resembles hand / finger marks.
- Burns or scalds.
- Human bites.
- Cigarette burns.
- Injuries that the child cannot explain or explains unconvincingly.
- Injuries in babies or non-mobile children.

Emotional abuse: 'the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate.

Emotional abuse may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.'

Symptoms of emotional abuse – what to look out for:

- Physical, mental or emotional development lags.
- Talks of excessive punishment.
- Fear of parents being contacted.
- Sudden speech disorders.
- Running away.
- Self-depreciation, low self-esteem.

Definition of neglect: ‘the persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child’s health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- a. Provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- b. Protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- c. Ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)
- d. ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child’s basic emotional needs.’

Symptoms of neglect – what to look out for:

- Child cold / inappropriately dressed.
- Undernourished – always hungry.
- Untreated medical problems eg dental decay, head lice.
- Lethargy, tiredness or aggressive tendencies.

Definition of sexual abuse: ‘involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.’

Note: the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2021) also includes reference to female genital mutilation which is a form of sexual abuse.

Symptoms of sexual abuse – what to look out for:

- Genital discomfort, pain, itching, bruising, injuries.
- Public / compulsive masturbation.
- Eating disorders.
- Sexually explicit behaviour or language not appropriate for their age.
- Sexually transmitted infection.
- Sexually explicit drawings.
- Pregnancy.

Behaviours that might indicate abuse:

- Marked change in general behaviour.
- Low self-esteem.
- Extremely passive / aggressive.
- Withdrawn / withdrawal from family or friends.
- Sleeping difficulties.
- Eating disorder.
- Lethargy / tiredness.
- Fear of certain adults.
- Poor social relationships.
- Bullying / anti-social behaviours.
- Attendance difficulties.
- Disclosure.
- Self-harm.

Notes:

******There are further useful definitions in the 'Working together to safeguard children' document – see Appendix A – glossary.

******There is further useful guidance on the symptoms of abuse on the NSPCC website.

******It is important to stay updated with changes in definitions. For example, upskirting is a crime and providers who care for older children should consider whether they need to do some professional development to better understand the risk of incel.

Appendix 2 – more information.

Please recognise the limitations of this guidance. I could write a lot more than a paragraph about each of these types of abuse, so this is by no means a comprehensive document.

What I hope to do here is provide an overview of the main types of abuse you might come across in your work with early years children (aged birth to age 5), older children on the Childcare Register and abuse you need to be aware of that might be occurring in your local community. However, this guidance will give you an overview only. If you suspect abuse, you should also look at other trusted sources for more information – for example, the Dept for Education, NSPCC website or your Local Safeguarding Partners.

In this guidance, have covered the main types of abuse Ofsted often frame questions around during inspection. Your Ofsted inspector might ask you to describe a type of abuse or pose safeguarding / child protection scenarios for you to explain further – for example, ‘What would you do if...?’

Ofsted has stated on the Childcare Registration Facebook page that, ‘Inspection is not a memory test’, so you can print this information as part of your safeguarding file and refer to it if you are unsure. The types of abuse included in this guidance are in alphabetical order for ease of access.

There is always more to learn about child protection and safeguarding, to help keep children safe, whether it’s through reading serious case reviews on the NSPCC website, looking up information to check your facts, doing some background reading and research for your own professional development or asking your Local Safeguarding Partners for guidance specific to supporting a child or their family.

Note that child protection / safeguarding is a constantly evolving subject and no guidance document will ever be completely up to date. For example, the name for ‘toxic trio’ recently changed on the NHS website to ‘trio of vulnerabilities’ and the requirement for nurseries and pre-schools to report disqualification by association was recently removed.

You will find a recently updated glossary of safeguarding terms available free from Childcare.co.uk here – <https://www.childcare.co.uk/childminderpaperwork>.

The types of abuse covered in this guidance include:

Note: you will have already read focused definitions of the 4 types of abuse noted in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) – physical, emotional, neglect and sexual.

- Breast ironing / flattening.
- Bruising in non-mobile babies and children.
- Bullying.
- Child criminal / sexual exploitation.
- Contextual safeguarding.
- County lines.
- Criminal exploitation.
- Cuckooing.
- Disqualification and disqualification by association (childminders only).
- Domestic abuse / violence.
- Emotional abuse.
- Fabricated or induced illness.
- Failure to collect.
- Faith based abuse.
- Female genital mutilation.
- Forced marriage.
- Grooming.
- Homelessness.
- Honour based violence.
- Human trafficking.
- Imprisoned family members.
- Inappropriate viewing.
- Incel.
- Looked after child.
- Lost / missing child.
- Mental health / wellbeing.
- Modern day slavery.
- Neglect.
- Obesity.
- Online abuse / sexting.
- Peer on peer / child on child abuse.
- Physical abuse.
- Prevent Duty.
- Private fostering.
- Safer sleep.
- Self-harm.
- Sexual abuse.
- Smacking.
- Trio of vulnerabilities.
- Uncollected child.

Breast ironing / flattening

Note that this type of abuse will be observed predominantly in relation to older children if you are registered on the compulsory or voluntary Childcare Register (England).

Definition – the National FGM Centre defines breast ironing as, ‘the process during which young pubescent girls’ breasts are ironed, massaged, flattened and/or pounded down over a period of time (sometimes years) in order for the breasts to disappear or delay the development of the breasts entirely.’

Signs and symptoms – the child’s breasts might not be developing; you might notice that the child does not want to get undressed in front of others and there might be a pattern of non-attendance on days when the child has PE at school. The child might have difficulty lifting their arms as the breast area will be tender to move and touch. walking or sitting hunched over.

Impact – the physical impact on the child might include abscesses, cysts or tissue damage. There will also be emotional damage.

Support the child – there is no specific law in the UK relating to breast flattening or breast ironing. If you have concerns about a child, record them and speak to the Local Safeguarding Partners for advice.

Protect the child – talk to children about body autonomy and the right to say ‘no’.

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Bruising on non-mobile babies and children

Definition – a child is considered non-independently mobile if they are not yet crawling or bottom shuffling, pulling to stand, cruising around furniture and / or walking independently. The definition includes all children under the age of 6 months and older children who might be non-mobile due to disabilities.

Signs and symptoms – babies and / or non-mobile children might have bruises or marks on their bodies which are either unexplained by parents or the parent might give you a reason for the mark, but the explanation does not fit the mark. In some cases, you might ask the parent for an explanation and they are vague, become very emotional or change their story about why it happened – for this and other reasons, some Local Safeguarding Partners state that marks should be reported without informing parents.

Impact – babies will suffer physical and emotional damage which might continue into later life if it goes unchecked by health and other professionals.

Support the child – you should have a written ‘non-mobile baby / child protocol’ which sets out your Local Safeguarding Partner’s response to how to react if you are concerned about, for example, unexplained marks on a non-mobile baby or child. The protocol will also state whether your Local Safeguarding Partners require you to discuss your concerns with parents before contacting them.

Protect the baby / child – every baby / child in the early years must have a named key person in the setting from day 1, who works with them closely and gets to know them well. the key person should be alert to changes in the baby or child’s temperament, behaviour and responses to touch and should report any concerns to the designated safeguarding lead in the setting or the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Bullying

Definition – Wikipedia states that, 'Bullying is the use of force, coercion, hurtful teasing or threat, to abuse, aggressively dominate or intimidate.' Bullying witnessed in an early years and older child setting might be related to, for example, cyber (online) bullying or a child being bullied because of their race, chosen sexual orientation (for example, homophobia), gender or disability.

Signs and symptoms – you might see a child shut off from their friends, act violently towards someone they previously were friends with, or role play might show you that they are struggling with relationships.

Impact – children are likely to suffer physical symptoms such as eating disorders and mental health issues – for example, increased stress and anxiety, depression, acting out violently, and low self-esteem (Kapersky.com). Experts advise that symptoms can continue long after the bullying has stopped.

Support the child – the Ofsted Early Years Inspection handbook states that you must record incidents of racist behaviour. Steps to take if you have a concern about a child include recording your observations and speaking to the child's family about steps to support them (see also child on child abuse).

Protect the child – in the setting you might plan targeted intervention activities to help children learn about the impact of bullying and teach children to say, 'no' or 'stop' if they are concerned about what is happening to them. alongside this, teach children about respect and tolerance (part of British values) and to stop what they are doing immediately if a child voices or reacts in a way that shows they are uncomfortable.

Child criminal / sexual exploitation

While you might feel that it is unlikely a child will be in an early years setting if they are being criminally or sexually exploited, it is not impossible if parents lie about the child's background. You might also have concerns about this type of abuse happening within your local community.

Definition – NSPCC states that, 'Criminal exploitation is child abuse where children and young people are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes.' Children who are being sexually exploited are forced to have sex, coerced into pornography, touched in a sexual way; adults might also refuse to use safe sex practices, such as protection during these actions.

Signs and symptoms – signs of criminal exploitation might include the child having unexplained money or good such as an extra mobile phone; signs of sexual exploitation might include a child having unhealthy or inappropriate sexual knowledge and actions which you see during role play or in play with other children.

Impact – the child will have long-term mental, emotional and physical signs that they have been abused.

Support the child – steps to take if you have a concern about a child include recording and reporting your concerns to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – ask parents for evidence of parental responsibility during sign-up – for example, view the child's birth certificate. Be present for children so they know you are a good listener.

Contextual safeguarding

Definition – NSPCC Learning states that, 'Contextual safeguarding looks at how we can best understand these risks, engage with children and young people and help to keep them safe. It's an approach that's often been used to apply to adolescents, though the lessons can equally be applied to younger children, especially in today's changing world.'

Signs and symptoms – young children and teenagers are exposed to ever increasing risks when they start to engage with the world around them virtually or in person. They might, for example, be radicalised or exposed to extremism, be trafficked or criminally or sexually exploited.

Impact – abuse the child might suffer includes physical, emotional, sexual or neglect.

Support the child – steps to take if you worried about a child's behaviour or influences affecting the child outside of the home environment – for example in school or college, in the local community, in their peer groups or online, include recording your concerns and reporting to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – you need to have a good understanding of your local community and a view that 'it might happen here' in relation to a wide range of safeguarding threats. You must also have close working partnerships with other settings and / or agencies involved in safeguarding children in the community. You can then be alert to dangers the child might be facing and ready to signpost places where they can be safe or find more support for themselves or their families.

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County lines

Note that this type of abuse will be observed predominantly in relation to older children if you are registered on the voluntary Childcare Register.

Definition – the police define county lines as a phrase, 'used in reference to a form of criminal activity in which drug dealers in major cities establish networks for the supply and sale of drugs to users in towns and rural areas, using other people (typically those who are young or otherwise vulnerable) to carry, store, and sell the drugs.'

Signs and symptoms – the child might be furtive or hiding what they are doing, carrying sums of money or a new phone or maybe absent from school or your setting without prior notification from parents.

Impact – abuse the child might suffer includes physical, emotional, sexual or neglect. The child might, for example, be threatened by the gang they are working for and exploited in other abusive ways such as coercive behaviour and threats to make them continue to work for them.

Support the child – county lines is a form of criminal exploitation. steps to take if you have a concern about a child include recording and reporting concerns to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – teach children about British values – right and wrong, the rule of law. Ensure children know they can talk to you and recognise the importance of speaking to a trusted adult if they are concerned about someone, for example, sending them inappropriate online messages or asking them to do something they know is wrong.

Criminal exploitation

Note that this type of abuse will be observed predominantly in relation to older children if you are registered on the compulsory or voluntary Childcare Register (England). However, it might impact younger children if older siblings or parents are, for example, part of a criminal gang.

Definition – NSPCC states, ‘Criminal exploitation is child abuse where children and young people are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes.’

Signs and symptoms – the child might be frequently missing from the setting; they might join a gang – a peer group, street gang or organised criminal gang thinking it will afford them ‘protection’ or ‘safety’.

NSPCC advice states, ‘It’s not illegal for a young person to be in 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.’

Impact – the child might be the victim of various types of abuse including violence or emotional abuse where they are pressured into doing things like stealing or carrying drugs or weapons. They might also be exploited and put into dangerous situations which they cannot control.

Support the child – steps to take if you have a concern about a child include recording and reporting to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – teach the child resilience and self-worth so they feel confident about themselves and their ability to manage situations. Be present for the child so they know there are trusted adults in their circle who they can talk to if they are concerned about, for example their friends or peer group.

Cuckooing

While this is unlikely to happen to young children in your immediate care, because it is generally considered an older person type of abuse, it might be a concern if a child’s family member is vulnerable or the trio of vulnerabilities is present in the household and drug dealers are using their property as a base.

Definition – NSPCC states that cuckooing involves, ‘the practice of taking over the home of a vulnerable person in order to establish a base for illegal drug dealing, typically as part of a county lines operation.’

Signs and symptoms – you might notice that there are a lot of comings and goings, during the day and through the night, at the home of a vulnerable neighbour. There might be an increase in anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhood and you might be verbally abused or see / smell signs of drug use.

Impact – the person in the house might be abused and suffer from neglect; drugs will be sold in the vicinity of your home address, often in family neighbourhoods.

Support the child – you should follow your Whistleblowing Policy. Steps to take if you have a concern include recording what you have seen / heard and contacting the police.

Protect the child – risk assess your safety in the community and, for example, walk the other way to avoid passing the house when you are caring for children; speak to children’s parents about the risks of, for example, parking in certain areas of the road or being drawn into conversations or altercations.

Disqualification

This is exemplified in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Note that disqualification by association is only relevant to childminders.

Definition – a childminder's circumstances might have changed, meaning they are disqualified from working with children; someone living or working in a childminder's or childminder assistant's house might be disqualified from working with children. Ofsted can advise on whether a waiver might be granted to allow the childminder / childminder's assistant to continue working.

Signs and symptoms – there are many signs, but as an example, a childminder or assistant might have criminal charges made against them for sexual abuse against a child or serious misconduct.

Impact – children will not be safe while in the childminder's care until Ofsted has investigated and made a decision about the childminder / assistant's continued suitability.

Support the child – steps to take if you have a concern about a colleague include recording what you have been told / what you know and following your Whistleblowing Policy.

Protect the child – know what you have to report to Ofsted and when, so you can ensure you are compliant with legislation.

Domestic abuse / violence

Definition – Women's Aid defines domestic abuse as, 'as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer.'

Signs / symptoms – you might observe a child shouting, hitting toys against each other or swearing in the role play area of the setting; a child might appear frightened of going home or be hyper vigilant to a parents' wellbeing while they are in the setting; a child might be aggressive or show anti-social behaviour; be attention seeking or regress in their behaviour and development; they might have eating disorders or struggle to engage in the setting; you might notice that there are regular patterns of non-attendance.

Impact – domestic abuse always has an impact on children, whether they see or hear the abuse happening in the household or feel it in the atmosphere around them.

Support the child – if you have concerns about domestic abuse, record them and speak to parents. For example, you might ask parents if there are any changes at home that might be impacting on the child's behaviour and / or attitudes to learning. Contact your Local Safeguarding Partners for further advice.

Protect the child – provide children with a safe environment in which they can play and interact with their key person and other children; support negative behaviour in a consistent way which acknowledges the pain they are feeling; be compassionate and understanding; listen if they want to talk to you.

Emotional abuse

Definition – the National Domestic Violence hotline defines emotional abuse as, ‘non-physical behaviors that are meant to control, isolate, or frighten you. This may present in romantic relationships as threats, insults, constant monitoring, excessive jealousy, manipulation, humiliation, intimidation, dismissiveness, among others.’ In children, this might be any attempt to frighten or manipulate the child; withdrawal of affection; lack of care or support.

Signs and symptoms – the child might be withdrawn or needy of adult attention or unconfident, wary or anxious in social situations. You might notice that they do not have a secure bond with their parents and withdraw when parents offer them physical touch. NSPCC states that children might also be, ‘aggressive or cruel towards other children or animals.’

Impact – when a child is shouted at regularly and affection is withheld they are likely to become withdrawn and anxious and will not engage in their play or learning; they will have low self-esteem and might appear depressed; some children seek affection and others appear emotionally withdrawn.

Support the child – record concerns and speak to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – teach children about appropriate relationships with children and adults; plan activities based on the PSED (personal, social and emotional development) aspects of the educational programmes in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

Fabricated or induced illness

Definition – the Dept for Education (2018) states that, ‘if a parent or carer deliberately induces illness in their child this is known as fabricated or induced illness’. It is a form of physical abuse and used to be known as ‘Munchausen’ and ‘Munchausen by proxy’.

Signs and symptoms – range from parents exaggerating or inventing symptoms in the child to deliberately making the child ill, so they spend time at home / away from the setting and patterns of attendance concern staff / management. Staff might comment that the child does not appear to be ill in the setting but is regularly ill when they are at home with parents / carers.

Impact – the child might be subjected to medical procedures they do not need, have time away from the setting which would impact on their learning, development and progress.

Support the child – record concerns and speak to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – talk to children about their bodies and the importance of keeping them healthy, well fed and hydrated; teach them to listen to their bodies and how they feel after exercise, during normal daily routines and when they feel hungry or tired.

Failure to collect

The statutory framework (England) states that early years providers must have a policy to follow if parents / carers fail to collect their child but it does not give, for example, timescales or information about what the policy should contain. These should be provided by the Local Authority Safeguarding team.

Definition – a parent does not collect their child due to forgetfulness or circumstances out of their control – for example, serious illness or death.

Signs and symptoms – a child is scheduled to leave the setting at a certain time and their parents / carers do not arrive to collect them.

Impact – the child might feel emotionally upset, especially if it happens regularly or is not handled well by frustrated staff members who appear angry and frustrated that parents have not arrived.

Support the child – information about the steps you need to take if a child is not collected should come from the Local Authority during safeguarding / child protection training.

Protect the child – work closely with parents to ensure you have contact numbers for trusted adults who you can contact if parents / carers do not arrive at the expected time and you are unable to contact them to find out a timescale for arrival. If parents / carers are unable to provide emergency contact details for, for example, grandparents or other relatives, explain to parents that you will be forced to contact social services and / or the police for further advice.

Faith based abuse

Definition – the Metropolitan Police service define faith-based abuse, 'Abuse linked to faith or belief is where concerns for a child's welfare have been identified, and could be caused by, a belief in witchcraft, spirit or demonic possession, ritual or satanic abuse features; or when practices linked to faith or belief are harmful to a child.'

Signs and symptoms – the child might be abused physically, emotionally sexually or through neglect. For example, Victoria Climbié was beaten (by family and a religious minister), starved, neglected and eventually died at the hands of those adults who were supposed to be caring for her.

Impact – the child might suffer all types of abuse.

Support the child – steps to take if you have a concern about a child – for example, if the child makes a disclosure or if parents make comments about the child which concern you include recording and reporting to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – teach children to show respect for religions and cultures in the local community and wider world; use British values to inform your curriculum; support children to recognise and understand different faiths by teaching about them – reading books, visiting religious buildings, marking special occasions through the year and learning about faith in the local community and wider world.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Definition – the NHS UK website defines FGM as, ‘A procedure where the female genitals are deliberately cut, injured or changed, but there's no medical reason for this to be done.’

Signs and symptoms – it will be uncomfortable for the child when using the toilet; they might become suddenly quiet, anxious or depressed after a ‘holiday’ to have the procedure.

Impact – the child will have problems throughout life with urination, infections, sexual intercourse and childbirth; they will suffer severe bleeding and be in constant pain.

Support the child – FGM is illegal in the UK. If you have a concern that a child has been cut or if they tell you they are ‘going on a special holiday’ for the summer to an area where they might be abused, record your concerns and contact the police, non-emergency line and your Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – teach the PANTS rule from the NSPCC so children recognise that PANTS are private, no one should ever make you do things that make you feel embarrassed or uncomfortable; during play ensure children recognise that they have a right to say ‘no’ and respect each other.

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Forced marriage

Note that this type of abuse will be observed predominantly in relation to older children if you are registered on the compulsory or voluntary Childcare Register (England). Also note that the legal marriage age in England was recently raised from 16 to 18 years of age. Citizens Advice Scotland state, ‘Opposite-sex and same-sex couples can get married in Scotland if they are both at least 16 years old’.

Definition – Gov.uk states that, ‘A forced marriage is where one or both people do not or cannot consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used to force them into the marriage.’

Signs and symptoms – a young or slightly older children might tell you that they are getting married or being taken out of the country to marry someone they haven’t met.

Impact – the child will be exposed to many types of abuse including sexual, emotional and corrosion from within their family and community to go through with the marriage ceremony. They might be threatened with death (honour killing) if they do not marry the person chosen for them.

Support the child – steps to take if you have a concern about a child include recording what the child has disclosed and speaking to the Local Safeguarding Partners. You can also report concerns directly to the police by phone (999) or by using the Crime Stoppers online notification portal.

Protect the child – anyone threatened with forced marriage or forced to marry against their will can apply for Forced Marriage Protection Order. If a child informs you that they are aware of or being threatened with forced marriage you can make them aware of their legal rights.

Grooming

Definition – the NSPCC states that, ‘Grooming is when someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a child or young person so they can manipulate, exploit and abuse them.’

Signs and symptoms – there was a recent case in a nursery where a practitioner groomed a child, constantly inviting her to sit on his knee and bringing in little presents for her. The serious case review noted that concerns raised by other nursery staff did not stop the abuse.

Impact – the child will suffer from physical and emotional abuse. They might be drawn to one particular practitioner and their behaviour could regress – for example, bedwetting if they were previously dry.

Support the child – steps to take if you have a concern about a child include informing the designated safeguarding lead in the setting who should then report it to the LADO (local authority designated officer). in a childminding setting, if a childminder or assistant thinks a child might be being groomed, they must record concerns and contact the LADO for further advice.

Protect the child – teach children about the PANTS rule – pants are private. Support children to make a wide range of friends in the setting. Everyone in an early years setting must take responsibility for a ‘culture of safeguarding’ (Ofsted) and raise concerns if they are worried about a child’s safety.

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Homelessness

Definition – a family, including children, does not have a secure place to live. Latest data from the charity Shelter shows at least 271,000 people are recorded as homeless in England, including 123,000 children.

Signs and symptoms – the child might tell you that they are living in a hostel or on the streets; they might not be clean or have clean clothes; parents might not be able to give you an address when you ask them to complete or update paperwork.

Impact – the child will be at risk of abuse including neglect. They might be exposed to inappropriate behaviour because they don’t have the security of a home in which to live.

Support the child – steps to take if you have a concern about a family with children losing their home / being homeless include recording what you have seen or heard and speaking to the Local Safeguarding Partners. You might also signpost local charities who can help them with food, a safe place to stay and finding a property and let them use your internet to apply for emergency housing.

Protect the child – ensure every child has a named key person who knows the child well and to whom the child knows they can talk. Keep updated regularly about parents contact details.

Honour based violence

Definition – Gov.uk defines honour based violence (previously known as honour based abuse) as ‘an incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion or abuse (including psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse) which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community’s code of behaviour.’

Signs and symptoms – the child or young adult might go missing from home / school; they might be withdrawn, upset, self-harm, appear depressed, angry or desperate; their movements might be restricted by family members and members of their community.

Impact – some girls have been killed for failing to marry, act or behave as expected by their family.

Support the child – if you have concerns, record them and report to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – teach children that they have a right to say ‘no’ and share places they can go and things they can do to keep themselves safe – for example, the number for ChildLine.

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Human trafficking

Definition – NATO defines human trafficking as, the trade of humans for the purpose of forced labour, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others.’

Signs and symptoms – you might notice children being forced to work or people hidden in a vehicle building near to where you live when you are on an outing. The people will be malnourished and may show signs of physical injuries and abuse. They are likely to avoid making eye contact and social interaction.

Impact – Wikipedia states, ‘Trafficking in human beings is considered a grave human rights violation that impacts men, women, boys and girls differently.’ Children will not have access to education and they will not be known to health services.

Support the child – if a child discloses they are aware of human trafficking, listen to them, record what they have told you using their words where possible and report to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – be aware of the child protection risks in your local authority. For example, have there been any instances of human trafficking locally? Work closely with your Local Safeguarding Partners and where possible attend local training to keep updated with latest threats.

Imprisoned parent

In England, there is an expectation that all those with parental responsibility for the child are involved in the child's time in the early years setting – from a learning, development and progress point of view you will need to talk to the parent / carer who is caring for the child and work out how you can do this effectively.

Definition – a parent or guardian is removed from the family and placed in prison.

Signs and symptoms – the child might tell you that their parent has been taken away or 'locked up'. They might be angry at the police, courts etc for removing their parent from the family home. Barnardo's state that, 'We know that children who have a parent in prison can feel isolated and ashamed - and most feel unable to talk about it because they're scared of being bullied.' The charity goes on to state that studies show that children with a family member in prison are 'more likely than other children to have mental health problems and to get in trouble with the law themselves as they grow up.'

Impact – the family might be at risk of homelessness and loss of financial support might lead to the child being neglected – hungry, no toys or access to safe places to live.

Support the child – if you have a concern about a child record, speak to the parent / carer who is caring for the child and ask the Local Safeguarding Partners for advice if appropriate.

Protect the child – where possible and practical, speak to the child about their parent in prison. There are books available and you can involve them in storytelling – try and get a photo so you can make mini-me blocks for the child and parent which they can use in role play.

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Inappropriate viewing

Definition – a child watches a video or game which is too far advanced for them. for example, a young child plays an age 16+ game.

Signs and symptoms – the child might be upset by what they have seen or heard on the game; their role play might change as they re-enact what they have seen online; they might hurt other children because they don't understand cause and effect or what, for example, death means.

Impact – there are several types of abuse which might occur including being drawn into terrorism and online grooming and emotional abuse. You should also consider neglect because, in the home environment, parents have a responsibility to monitor and supervise what their child is doing online.

Support the child – if you have a concern about what a child is doing or seeing online, record it and speak to their parents to find out what they are aware of happening at home. remind them about appropriate viewing ages and inform them that you will have to make a safeguarding disclosure because of the impact of what the child is doing on their wellbeing.

Protect the child – talk to children about staying safe online; let children be children and play in your setting, so they take those play skills into their home lives. Share information with parents about online safety and appropriate viewing for different ages of children.

Incel

Definition – the Wikipedia definition is, ‘An incel is a member of an online subculture of people who define themselves as unable to get a romantic or sexual partner despite desiring one.’ Members of the subculture are typically associated with views that are hostile towards women and their online presence is described on the Safer Schools website as, ‘A place filled with hatred and misogyny’.

Signs and symptoms – this is more likely to be an older child / young adult who might spend extended periods of time online and might talk negatively about girls / women. Experts advise that young boys who feel isolated, rejected and ostracised are particularly vulnerable.

Impact – the child / young adult will present as angry – sometimes towards women but also possibly using racist language and having strong views which do not support healthy friendships, which makes them fall deeper into the online world where they their feelings and understood.

Support the child – steps to take if you have a concern about a child include recording what you have seen, heard or been told and speaking to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – supervise online use, put security on all internet devices, require copies of login details and passwords and check what sites children have accessed. Teach children about respect and tolerance of others.

Looked after child

Definition – NSPCC states that, ‘A child who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours is known as a looked after child. Looked after children are also often referred to as children in care, a term which many children and young people prefer.’

Signs and symptoms – NSPCC states that, ‘Looked after children come from a range of different backgrounds and have varied experiences of care.’ Children might also have been taken out of their home area to another Local Authority where they are not introduced to or known by health and social care services – for example, doctors and health visitors which could lead to neglect going unnoticed.

Impact – children might experience abuse while in care or might have been abused before they arrive in care. This will leave them with often long-term and complex emotional and mental health needs and they will usually be particularly vulnerable to abuse.

Support the child – if you have a concern about a child record what you have been told / what you have seen or heard and report to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – offer all children a secure place to play. Work closely with the local authority / social services to help the child. Offer the child whatever they need to feel safe – food, a listening ear, a bath etc recognising that children have ‘varied experiences’ while in care and might be embarrassed to ask for help.

Missing child

You must have a procedure on what to do if a child is lost / goes missing in your Safeguarding Policy.

Definition – a child is missing if they have disappeared from your sight / hearing – for example, if you expected a parent or carer to bring them to your setting and they did not arrive; or if they have run off while you are in the playground at school or at the park. Note that children cannot bring themselves – they are reliant on someone – a parent, carer or other adult – to bring them to the setting.

Signs and symptoms – children missing from home and / or education might be in danger of being abused or trafficked. This will cause them long-term damage.

Impact – if a child is not being brought to the setting on their scheduled days, they will miss out on their early years education.

Support the child – – if you have a concern about a child record what you have been told / what you have seen or heard; inform the Local Authority if the child is funded; record concerns about patterns of attendance; report to the police if a child does not arrive and you cannot contact parents / emergency contacts to find out where the child is; report the child as missing to the Local Safeguarding Partners. Inform Ofsted after the event using the serious incident notification form.

Protect the child – work closely with parents so they recognise the importance of regular attendance and letting you know if they cannot bring their child. Write down your procedures and be ready to follow them if you have a concern about or, for example, lose a child.

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Mental health / wellbeing

Definition – CDC states that, 'Being mentally healthy during childhood means reaching developmental and emotional milestones and learning healthy social skills and how to cope when there are problems.'

Signs and symptoms – poor mental health in children might be linked to low wellbeing in the setting and behaviour changes, self-harming (head banging or hurting themselves), food refusal, sleep problems and changes in social habits – for example, hurting friends.

Impact – Poor mental health / low wellbeing can cause a child to be unable to concentrate on their play and to withdraw from social groups. As the child struggles with behaviour, staff might punish them instead of supporting their need to be heard or as the child struggles with their diet, they might lose or gain weight rapidly which will impact on their overall health.

Support the child – if you are concerned about a change in a child's mental health or wellbeing, speak to parents / the child if they are old enough, to find out what might have happened or changed in their life – you can then support them. You might also find it useful to monitor children's mental health and wellbeing using the Leuven scales of wellbeing and involvement.

Protect the child – ensure all children are provided with a secure routine within a caring setting and positive relationships with start with a key person they know well.

Modern day slavery

Definition – Gov.uk defines modern-day slavery as, 'The recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation.' It is a crime under the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

Signs and symptoms – examples of modern-day slavery include forced labour and forced marriage. Both refer to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or cannot leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, or abuse of power.

Impact – a child in this situation will suffer all types of abuse – physical, emotional, neglect and possibly sexual, if they are being forced or coerced and exploited. This will have a long-term impact on the child's life as they are likely to be kept away from school and health services.

Support the child – report concerns to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – embed the key person role within the setting; monitor children's wellbeing and involvement in activities and note any changes; ensure all children in your care know that they can ask for advice and help if they feel threatened or concerned.

Neglect

NSPCC notes that neglect is currently considered to be the most common form of child abuse.

Definition – NSPCC defines neglect as, 'The ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs. A child might be left hungry or dirty, or without proper clothing, shelter, supervision or health care. This can put children and young people in danger.'

Signs and symptoms – a child might not be clean or fed; their health needs might not be met. They might live in unsuitable housing – for example, not having food or heating. You might notice changes in behaviour and attitudes to engagement and learning if a child's family circumstances change and they are unable to effectively care for their child.

Impact – the child will fail to thrive.

Support the child – if you have a concern about a child record them and speak to your Local Safeguarding Partners about how to support the child. For example, there is a form which must be completed on the Cheshire East Safeguarding Partners website before providers can refer a child for neglect and thresholds that must be reached. You might also signpost parents to local services such as food banks.

Protect the child – focus on the key person role in the setting and ensure the parent/s and child knows they can come and talk to you if something is worrying them. Teach the children how to care for themselves – healthy eating, water to drink, hygiene, dental health etc and share this information with parents to support children's home learning.

Obesity

Definition – the World Health Organisation defines obesity as, ‘Abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health.’

Signs and symptoms – in addition to carrying excessive bodyweight the child might suffer from symptoms such as shortness of breath, fatigue, increased sweating, sleep apnoea and snoring, joint pain and dislocated hips, flat feet and knock knees, skin rashes and irritation.

Impact – research shows that obese children can become obese adults who have a poor relationship with food. This might be because, for example, they have eaten unhealthy foods or been told to ‘clear their plate’ by adults who do not allow them to recognise when they are full. There are also medical conditions which cause children to overeat.

Support the child – if you have a concern about a child’s weight, speak to parents / carers about, for example, healthy portion sizes for their child and share menu ideas. There is information on the DfE ‘Help for early years providers’ website about healthy eating which might also be shared and parents can get more advice from their health visitor. If your concerns continue, you might consider neglect and speak to the Local Safeguarding Partners for advice.

Protect the child – ensure all children have a healthy diet and lots of exercise in the early years setting. Model healthy eating and include activities such as preparing and cooking healthy food, learning about where food comes from and how it can keep our bodies healthy and growing vegetables in your curriculum.

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Online abuse / sexting

Definition – there is no legal definition of online abuse but NSPCC states it is, ‘any type of abuse that happens on the internet.’ Sexting will usually happen on a phone, but it will be connected to the internet and often involve the sending and receiving of inappropriate images.

Signs and symptoms – children and young adults will become secretive about their online use and will probably spend a lot more time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media. They might seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting and may not want to put their phones down when eating with the family or on outings.

Impact – the child might be drawn into other types of abusive and coercive activities – for example, county lines drug dealing, serious violence, incel and criminal exploitation.

Support the child – if you have a concern about a child, speak to parents about their online viewing and behaviour at home. You might also consider this in the remit of contextual safeguarding and involve other agencies and professionals to support the child.

Protect the child – I woke to an article this morning with the title, ‘Ruthless drugs gangs are grooming youngsters and recruiting them through online gaming, MPs are warned’. Teach children about rule of law (British values) and how to say and respect ‘no’. Ensure children are fully supervised online at all times.

Peer on peer / child on child abuse

Definition – the police define peer on peer abuse as, 'A term used to describe children abusing other children ... it can include bullying (including online bullying and bullying because of someone's race, religion, sexuality, disability or trans status) abuse by your girlfriend, boyfriend or partner.' It was extended to include child on child abuse in the Keeping children safe in education guidance, which early years providers in England must have regard to, to comply with the statutory framework.

Signs and symptoms – the child might have physical injuries or you might observe emotional / wellbeing changes which might indicate that they are being bullied.

Impact – over time, the child might become withdrawn and unable to engage in activities in the setting; at home, parents might notice their sleep patterns change and they might become withdrawn or needy.

Support the child – record all concerns. If you have a concern about a child or group of children participating in or being subjected to child on child abuse, record and speak to parents. If the abuse is between siblings, suggest ways parents might support their children. You might be able to access help through the health visitor.

Protect the child – teach children to respect each other (British values). Review your curriculum to ensure you help children learn about similarities and differences between people and in the local community and wider world.

Physical abuse

Definition – physical abuse is defined by the Dept of Health (2017) as 'deliberately hurting a child and causing physical harm.'

Signs and symptoms – you might observe regular patterns of non-attendance while the child is recovering from abuse and / or unexplained cuts, bruises, cuts, burns and fractures. Injuries that don't coincide with the explanation and untreated medical or dental needs are also signs of physical abuse.

Impact – the child might be frightened of physical contact or overly anxious and needy in the setting; they might be aggressive during their play with other children. Physical abuse can impact on a child's development and might cause behaviour regression, brain damage, internal injuries and death.

Support the child – record your concerns. You would normally speak to parents about the marks on their child but if you feel the injuries might be worse by asking parents questions, report concerns to the Local Safeguarding Partners for further investigation. Note that your Non-Mobile Baby / Child Protocol should state that any bruises or marks on a non-mobile baby or child should be recorded and raised as a concern with the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – share positive parenting techniques with parents; listen to children and ensure they know they can speak to you if they are worried.

Prevent Duty

Definition – Gov.uk defines prevent duty as, ‘a duty on specified authorities to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.’ This legislation is contained within the Counter Terrorism and Security Act (2015).

Signs and symptoms – the child might start talking about making guns or bombs; you might see unusually aggressive gun play; the child’s family might tell you that their child cannot play with another child; the child might be suddenly disrespectful towards other children or staff. The NSPCC states that the child or young person may be, ‘groomed online or in person; exploitation, including sexual exploitation; psychological manipulation and / or exposure to violent material and other inappropriate information.’

Impact – children are particularly vulnerable to radicalisation. Research shows they may already have low self-esteem and they may be victims of bullying or discrimination; they might feel isolated or alone and be looking for a new friendship group.

Support the child – if you are concerned a child is being radicalised or exposed to extremism, record what you have seen and heard and speak to parents about whether they have noticed any changes in their child’s behaviour at home. You should also ask advice from the Local Safeguarding partners.

Protect the child – in the early years, the aim is to stop children from being drawn into / supporting terrorism, holding prejudiced views and / or being exposed to extremist influences. You can do this by teaching British values – democracy, rule of law, individual liberty and respect and tolerance of others

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Private fostering

Definition – private fostering is ‘a private arrangement between a parent and a carer. When a child under 16 (or 18 if disabled) is cared for and provided with accommodation, by an adult who is not a relative, for 28 days or more, it is called private fostering.’ (Hackney council online).

Signs and symptoms – the carers who bring the child to you might not be able to give you proof of parental responsibility or complete other details on the contract and child record forms about the child.

Impact – wellbeing of children in private fostering arrangements varies. Some children are well cared for while others are subjected to and / or at risk from a range of different types of abuse.

Support the child – if you have a concern about a child’s living / home arrangements, speak to the Local Safeguarding Partners in the area where the child lives for advice.

Protect the child – ensure your initial documentation is robust (contract, all about me, child information form, starting points) etc so you are reassured that the people who bring the child to you know the child well. Ask for sight of the child’s birth certificate to check the names of those people who have parental responsibility for the child – this is not a requirement of the statutory framework (England) but it is advised by safeguarding consultants to protect the child. You will find a box on the Childcare.co.uk parent / childminder contract which you can check when you have viewed evidence of parental responsibility.

Safer sleep

Note that the term 'cot death' is discouraged by health professionals because it suggests cots are not safe places for babies to sleep. Safe sleep advice is signposted in the statutory framework (England).

Definition – the Lullaby Trust defines safer sleep as, 'Steps for how you can sleep your baby to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)'.

Signs and symptoms – parents might tell you, for example, that their baby sleeps on their tummy at home or you see a photo of a cot full of teddies and bumper cushions. In an early years childcare setting, the statutory framework (England) states that children must be regularly checked when they are sleeping and rooms must be risk assessed; bedding must be clean for every child.

Impact – babies and young children have died sleeping in unsuitable places such as on bean bags or sofa cushions when they roll and cannot roll back again; babies have also died sleeping in their parents beds; babies must sleep in safe bedrooms where they are not too hot or too cold.

Support the child – if you have a concern about a child's sleep at home, share information about safe sleep and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). They might also be advised to ask the health visitor for more information.

Protect the child – your risk assessment should cover all aspects of safe sleep in the NHS guidance. Ofsted inspectors will look at and ask you about, for example, when you check sleeping babies and children, how you monitor temperatures, blind cords dangling over cots, cots placed next to radiators etc.

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Self-harm

Definition – Mind.org states that 'Self-harm is when you hurt yourself as a way of dealing with very difficult feelings, painful memories or overwhelming situations and experiences.'

Signs and symptoms – you might notice marks on a child's body – often lines caused by sharp objects which they try to cover up by wearing inappropriate clothes for the weather; the child might deliberately hurt themselves by banging their head against furniture, the floor or a wall; they might pull out their hair or change their eating habits to over or under-eat.

Impact – the child might suffer long-term emotional and physical symptoms from the self-harm.

Support the child – if you have a concern about a child record and speak to parents who might find support from their health visitor, school nurse or doctor. If concerns are ongoing, you can speak to the Local Safeguarding Partners for advice.

Protect the child – ensure children have a named key person they feel safe with and monitor their wellbeing. Review your curriculum to include self-care, self-esteem and other activities which support children to have a positive image of themselves.

Sexual abuse

Definition – NSPCC states, ‘When a child or young person is sexually abused, they’re forced or tricked into sexual activities. They might not understand that what’s happening is abuse or that it’s wrong. And they might be afraid to tell someone. Sexual abuse can happen anywhere – and it can happen in person or online.’ They also note that, ‘It’s never a child’s fault they were sexually abused – it’s important to make sure children know this.’

Signs and symptoms – the child might have marks or bleeding which suggest they have been abused or they might disclose abuse to you. Signs include changes in wellbeing and hiding physical marks. FGM is a form of sexual abuse and is illegal in the UK (see female genital mutilation).

Impact – for some victims and survivors, effects of childhood sexual abuse endure throughout adult life. Child sexual abuse can affect psychological and physical well-being, family relationships and more.

Support the child – if you have a concern about a child being sexually abused or if a child discloses sexual abuse, do not speak to parents. Record and immediately report to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – teach children about body autonomy and the PANTS rule (NSPCC). Support children through the key person role to know they can speak to a trusted adult if they are worried about something that is happening at home or something a friend has told them.

Smacking

Definitions and legislation – in England, ‘It is unlawful for a parent to smack their child in England except where this may amount to ‘reasonable punishment’.’ The term ‘reasonable punishment’ is not defined.

In Scotland, ‘All forms of physical punishment of children are against the law including child assault.’

Under the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020, All types of physical punishment, such as smacking, hitting, slapping and shaking, are illegal.’

Signs and symptoms – the child might have a handprint mark on their body; they might tell you they have been hurt by a parent; they might show other signs of abuse including physical, emotional symptoms and neglect. In the household, there might be concerns about parents struggling with finances, housing, loss of work etc and any of the trio of vulnerabilities might be present.

Impact – the child might suffer long-term emotional and physical harm as a result of abuse.

Support the child – believe the child if you are told that they have been hurt by a parent or other family member; record their disclosure and speak to parents (in England). If there are repeated disclosures by the child or marks on the child which lead you to believe the punishment is more than ‘reasonable’ and / or you are concerned about abuse, report to the Local Safeguarding Partners. You must report all incidents of marks on non-mobile babies or children because they are unlikely to be accidental.

Protect the child – ensure children have a secure key person within the setting they can speak to and who knows them well; monitor children’s wellbeing and involvement so you spot if there are any changes.

Trio of vulnerabilities

Definition – formerly known as ‘the toxic trio’ the trio of vulnerabilities is used by the NHS to describe, ‘the issues of domestic abuse, mental ill-health and substance misuse which have been identified as common features of families where harm to children and adults has occurred.’

Signs and symptoms – you might observe any of the 4 main types of abuse – physical, emotional, neglect or sexual and children might be at risk from being exposed to domestic violence.

Impact – children who live in households where the trio of vulnerabilities exist are considered 'vulnerable children' by health services because they are at greater risk of experiencing physical or emotional harm and/or experiencing poor outcomes because of one or more factors in their lives. Some vulnerable children may also have adverse childhood experiences.

Support the child – if you have a concern about a child record what you have seen and heard and report to the Local Safeguarding Partners.

Protect the child – ensure children have a secure key person within the setting they can speak to and who knows them well; monitor children's wellbeing and involvement so you spot if there are any changes; work in close partnership with parents and to monitor whether children are safe at home. Do not think, ‘It can't happen here’ or be drawn in by parental ‘disguised compliance’ where parents, ‘Give the appearance of co-operating with child welfare agencies to avoid raising suspicions and allay concerns’ (NSPCC).

Uncollected child

You must have a procedure on what to do if a child is uncollected in your Safeguarding Policy.

Definitions and legislation – a child is defined as uncollected if their parent / carer does not collect them at the correct / expected time at the end of their booked childcare session.

Signs and symptoms – the child might still be with you long after their parent was expected due to accident, inattention or serious incident preventing them from arriving.

Impact – the child might be emotional and upset if they were watching and waiting for their parent – this is especially true of children who have special educational needs and / or disabilities, for whom timescales and routines are very important.

Support the child – follow the procedures set out by your Local Safeguarding Partners during training. For example, after 10 / 15 minutes, make every attempt to contact the parents and emergency contacts; if the child does not have emergency contacts beyond the parents and they do not answer, contact social services and / or the police for further guidance. Inform Ofsted after the event using the serious incident notification form.

Protect the child – explain to the child that they are safe if parents are delayed. Reflect on your curriculum to support children's self-regulation and emotional awareness.

References

- Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 03.2021):
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>.
- Childcare Register (DfE, 2022):
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childminders-and-childcare-providers-register-with-ofsted/registration-requirements>.
- Early Years Inspection handbook (Ofsted, 07.2021):
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-inspection-handbook-eif>.
- Further references and sources of information noted in the text.

Further information

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