



Prayer Spaces in Schools and Safeguarding in England and Wales

overview

"Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play."

Keeping children safe in education

Statutory guidance for schools and colleges

Date of issue: September 2023

Publisher: Department for Education

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

One of our stated values for Prayer Spaces in Schools is this:

Safe

Prayer Spaces ensure that children and young people feel safe and are effectively protected from harm.

In running a prayer space you are creating an environment where children or young people have the potential to be vulnerable, either because of the thoughts or feelings they may be processing or because of the access that unsuitable team members could have to them.

There are three things you need to do when planning your prayer space.

Discuss with the Designated Safeguarding Lead

This is the person responsible for safeguarding in the school. They will also have a deputy. Find out who they are and discuss with them the safeguarding procedures for the school and for the prayer space including how to report concerns.

Recruit safely

As organiser you have responsibility for ensuring that the volunteers you use are safe to work with pupils in school and there will be some checks you need to make.

Train your team

You should already have received safeguarding training and had a DBS check for work with children. You also need to ensure that your team members understand the signs of abuse or neglect and know how to respond appropriately.

This document is not a substitute for full safeguarding training for yourself or your team and we recommend that you cover this in greater detail in your team training prior to running the prayer space.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility

“Keeping Children Safe in Education” sets out the responsibilities of anyone working with children (anyone under 18) in education.

Paragraph 2 – Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is **everyone's** responsibility. **Everyone** who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play. In order to fulfil this responsibility effectively, all practitioners should make sure their approach is child centred. This means that they should consider, at all times, what is in the **best interests** of the child.

Paragraph 3 – No single practitioner can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances. If children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, **everyone** who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action.

Paragraph 4 – Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined for the purposes of this guidance as:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing the impairment of children's mental and physical health or development
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care, and
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

You, as team leader, and your volunteers have the same responsibility for safeguarding as every other member of staff in the school.

If you become aware of a concern your duty is to **report**, not to investigate. We are there to support the pupils and to work with the school safeguarding processes.

Safeguarding and schools

We hope that you are already working with the school in some way, perhaps as a regular visitor. If they've invited you to run a prayer space then they clearly want you there and will be keen to ensure that safeguarding measures are appropriate. As a visitor it is likely that you've been accompanied by a member of staff during previous visits. When you are running a prayer space this may not always be possible (for example, during break or lunch times) so the school will want to put other measures in place.

The school will have its own safeguarding policy. Most will also produce a leaflet with the most relevant and essential information for visitors. Make sure you have a copy of this and that all of your volunteers have read it. In particular you need to know who the School Designated Safeguarding Lead is and who their deputy is. We recommend that you meet with them prior to running the prayer space to explain what will be happening and to agree safeguarding procedures for your team in the school.

DBS Checks

The Disclosure and Barring Service carries out criminal record checks to prevent unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups, including children.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service/about>

Visitors to schools don't have to be DBS checked if they are accompanied at all times by a member of staff. However, running a prayer space gives you and your team opportunities to work closely with pupils, for example when showing them how to do an activity or when they want to chat about an activity. And if your space is open to pupils at break or lunch time there may not be a teacher present. It is therefore essential that you can prove to the school that you are all safe to work with children.

One aspect of this is to ensure that everyone in the prayer space has had a DBS check for work with children and that you have their details. You will usually need to pass this information on to the school. Volunteers will also probably need to bring their DBS certificate and photo ID with them on their first visit to the school.

As the prayer space leader the school may accept your DBS certificate, especially if you have subscribed to the DBS Update Service.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dbs-update-service-promotional-material>

The update service is an online subscription that allows you to keep your DBS certificate up to date and allows employers to check a certificate online. But you must register within 30 calendar days of the date of issue on your DBS certificate.

As team leader if you are going to be overseeing the prayer space for the whole time the school may ask that they do a DBS check on you beforehand so make sure you check with the DSL well in advance to see if they require this.

Recruiting volunteers

You should follow a safe recruitment process for all your volunteers. You should give them a short job description and they should complete an application form that includes giving contact details for two references.

Only use people who have had a DBS check for work with children or young people, either for your organisation or for a church or other organisation.

Don't forget, the reputation of your church or organisation, and the safety and well-being of the pupils, is down to you and the people you recruit.

Other things

- It would be wise to check with the insurer of your church or organisation that they cover legal expense in the case of an allegation of abuse being made against one of your team.
- We recommend that you keep a record of all those who have helped to run the prayer space and their DBS reference details.
You can get them to sign a basic Voluntary Disclosure form on which they declare whether they have any convictions or cautions relating to work with children or young people and confirm that they have read the safeguarding policies for the prayer space and for the school and will abide by them. Note that this constitutes personal data and should therefore be securely held in compliance with your privacy policy.

There is an example of this type of form on the next page.

Local School
Date of Prayer Space

DBS references and Voluntary Disclosure

By signing this form you are confirming that:

- ☒ You have no convictions or current criminal charges pending in the case of offences against children or young people.
- ☒ You have read and will comply with the Safeguarding policies for Local School and for adults working in Prayer Space.

Name	DBS ref no. Organisation	DBS ref date Registered Body	Signature
Francis of Assisi Youth Worker - Child Workforce	001234567890 St. Mary's Church	21 October 2023 Thirtyone:Eight	Francis Assisi

Working safely in the prayer space.

Here are a few key principles to follow.

- **Work in pairs** — There should be a minimum of two adults, ideally at least one of each gender, in the prayer space whenever there are pupils present. If this is not possible the room must be closed. Never be on your own with a young person where you can't be observed.
- **Work appropriately** — Avoid any contact with young people which is, *or could be interpreted as being*, inappropriate, sexual or violent (words, threats, jokes, actions).
- **Do not take concerns out of the school** — If you are told about a situation of abuse, neglect, anything illegal or potentially harmful, you must pass this information immediately to the class teacher (unless they are the cause of your concern) or go straight to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or their deputy. You should also make your own notes about the conversation as soon as possible and before leaving the school (the school will have a specific reporting form for this). A copy of these notes should be left with the DSL, their deputy or a senior member of staff.
- **Disclosure of abuse** — Don't promise confidentiality. If a young person wants to talk to you listen, but you must not investigate or ask leading questions. Let the child know that you will need to tell a senior member of staff that the conversation has taken place. Assure them they are not to blame and that they have done the right thing by telling you. You should also make your own notes about the conversation as soon as possible and before leaving the school.
- **Contact details** — Do not accept or give contact details to any student or make contact through social media, even after the prayer space has finished.

If you have a concern, act on it.

Have an attitude of 'It could happen here' where safeguarding is concerned. You might be the first to realise there is reason to be concerned about a pupil. Don't assume that

someone else already knows or will notice later. Don't walk out of the school knowing something of concern that you have not passed on.

Don't take concerns out of the school.

Concerns and Confidentiality

We have a separate document, "Concerns and Confidentiality" which sets out the current best practice in managing pupil responses in a prayer space in keeping with your responsibilities towards the child and the school with regard to balancing the priorities of safeguarding and confidentiality.

The key point is that when you have a concern or a pupil discloses to you about abuse or neglect you must share that information, but only with those who need to know and who can act on the information.

DfE guidance is here:

Information Sharing: Advice for Practitioners Providing Safeguarding Services to Children, Young People, Parents and Carers

Note that data protection legislation does not prevent you from reporting a concern even if the child has not given permission for you to do so. Safeguarding always has a higher priority than confidentiality.

DPA and UK GDPR do not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe and promoting their welfare. If in any doubt about sharing information, staff should speak to the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy).

Fears about sharing information **must not** be allowed to stand in the way of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Keeping children safe in education - paragraph 57

Understanding child abuse and neglect

Just a reminder that this document is not a substitute for full safeguarding training for yourself or your team and we recommend that you cover this in greater detail in your team training prior to running the prayer space.

What is child 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. We know that 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.

NSPCC

Abuse is generally recognised under four categories.

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.

Emotional abuse. The persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and 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. It 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 from participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyberbullying), 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, although it may occur alone.

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. The sexual abuse of children by other children is a specific safeguarding issue in education.

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, for example, as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to: provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment); protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger; ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers); or ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Don't forget that alcohol or substance abuse, by the pupil, their peers or their carers can also put children in danger.

In addition, you should be aware that safeguarding issues can manifest themselves via child on child abuse. This 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).

The above descriptions are from
Keeping children safe in education, paragraph 35

The **NSPCC** has an excellent overview of various forms of child abuse which can be read here:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/>

Specific forms of abuse

What follows is some additional information about specific forms of abuse. For more detail read **Keeping children safe in education, Annex B**

Child criminal exploitation (CCE)

CCE is where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. CCE does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact: it can also occur through the use of technology.

County lines

County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs (primarily crack cocaine and heroin) into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”.

Exploitation is an integral part of the county lines offending model with children and vulnerable adults exploited to move [and store] drugs and money. Offenders will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons to ensure compliance of victims. Children can be targeted and recruited into county lines in a number of locations including schools, further and higher educational institutions, pupil referral units, special educational needs schools, children’s homes and care homes.

Domestic abuse

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to: psychological; physical; sexual; financial; and emotional.

All children can witness and be adversely affected by domestic abuse in the context of their home life where domestic abuse occurs between family members. Exposure to domestic abuse and/or violence can have a serious, long lasting emotional and psychological impact on children. In some cases, a child may blame themselves for the abuse or may have had to leave the family home as a result.

So-called ‘honour-based’ violence

So-called ‘honour-based’ violence (HBV) encompasses incidents or crimes which have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or the community. Abuse committed in the context of preserving “honour” often involves a wider network of family or community pressure and can include multiple perpetrators. All forms of HBV are abuse (regardless of the motivation) and should be handled and escalated as such.

Female Genital Mutilation

FGM comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs. It is illegal in the UK and a form of child abuse with long-lasting harmful consequences.

The Female Genital Mutilation Act places a statutory duty upon teachers along with regulated health and social care professionals in England and Wales, to report to the police where they discover (either through disclosure by the victim or visual evidence) that FGM appears to have been carried out on a girl under 18.

Forced marriage

Forcing a person into a marriage is a crime in England and Wales. A forced marriage is one entered into without the full and free consent of one or both parties and where violence, threats or any other form of coercion is used to cause a person to enter into a marriage. Threats can be physical or emotional and psychological. A lack of full and free consent can be where a person does not consent or where they cannot consent (if they have learning disabilities, for example). Nevertheless, some communities use religion and culture as a way to coerce a person into marriage.

Preventing radicalisation

Children are vulnerable to extremist ideology and radicalisation. Similar to protecting children from other forms of harms and abuse, protecting children from this risk should be a part of a schools’ or colleges’ safeguarding approach.

Extremism is the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. This also includes calling for the death of members of the armed forces.

Radicalisation refers to the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex. It can also occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children.

Children who are victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment will likely find the experience stressful and distressing. This will, in all likelihood, adversely affect their educational attainment. Sexual violence and sexual harassment exist on a continuum and

may overlap, they can occur online and offline (both physical and verbal) and are never acceptable. It is important that all victims are taken seriously and offered appropriate support.

Stay up to date

To keep up to date with the latest news and guidance on safeguarding in schools we recommend that you subscribe to the weekly briefing from:

<https://www.safeguardingschools.co.uk>