

PROTECTING CHILDREN UPDATE



Safeguarding children and young people in education

Dysfunction in families crosses generations

Louise Casey, head of the Government's Troubled Families programme, has published a report looking at the problems families face that is based on 16 case study interviews. In *Listening to Troubled Families*, she investigates the problems experienced, what caused the problems and what sort of help will enable them to change.

The report found that child abuse was a factor in the dysfunction of many of the families and says: 'Perhaps the starkest message to take from these interviews is the extent to which the problems of these families are linked and reinforcing. They accumulate across the life course, passed on from parents to their children across generations of the same family.'

The report argues that the traditional approach of services reaching individual family members, at or after crisis point, and trying to fix single issues such as drug use, non-attendance at school or domestic violence in these families is destined to fail.

Their behaviours and problems can only be properly understood by looking at the whole cycle – and the whole family. This requires services that work with families to look at what has happened to the parents as children and at what has happened to the children since birth.

Listening to Troubled Families <http://bit.ly/NaikT>

Radio 4 *Moral Maze* debate on the issue: <http://bbc.in/NaH16v>

Violence between parents is just as damaging to children

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) has published a report on domestic abuse and its effect on children. *Beyond Violence: Breaking Cycles of Domestic Abuse* cites research evidence which shows that living with domestic abuse between parents is as psychologically harmful to children as when they are direct victims of physical abuse. It argues that children's needs are often overlooked, and that government should focus more on early intervention where there is domestic abuse.

It recommends that central and local government should fund and evaluate pilot programmes to build restorative parent-child relationships following domestic abuse, as well as providing counselling and therapy to children living with violence.

All LAs need to join with statutory and voluntary agency partners to design and implement a system of integrated working that proactively identifies at-risk children and responds to them and their families with timely offers of help. As most victims and their children access support at the GP's surgery or hospital, the report argues that more help for domestic abuse should be concentrated in health services.

The report states: 'We reiterate recommendations... about the need to make universal and targeted wellbeing and mental health services available in schools to ensure children who have been exposed to domestic abuse receive the timely and non-stigmatising help they need to flourish.'

Beyond Violence <http://bit.ly/NJ4jvS>

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From the editor

Welcome back! I hope you have had a good break. In this issue we have a great range of articles.

On page 4, Anne Marie Christian describes her experience of working with young people at risk of **sexual exploitation and how schools can respond**. Carol Smith's school was recently judged outstanding for safeguarding by Ofsted. Carol explains how they achieved this, and offers practical advice on how to **demonstrate to Ofsted that your safeguarding practice is outstanding** on page 6.

Most DSPs/named persons will have attended a child protection conference, and know how daunting it can be. If you haven't already attended one it is highly likely that you will in the future, so whether you are experienced or new to it, turn to page 8 for Tim Barker's tips on **how to survive a case conference**.

On the last few pages you'll find an overview of research looking at **lessons learned from serious case reviews**.

The full report is huge, but well worth a read. Here we discuss the findings that are most relevant to education staff. Unsurprisingly, neglect features high in many of the cases. Read on!

We can't squeeze all of this into your newsletter. Make the most of the whole *Safeguarding Support Service*

Protecting Children Update is part of the **Safeguarding Support Service**. That means, as a subscriber, you have online access to best practice case studies, the latest safeguarding news, changed government policies and expert support that we can't fit in the newsletter.

Make the most of your subscription – don't miss:

- Using a genogram to help a child tell his story: <http://bit.ly/MJQ3Au>
- Forced marriage to become a criminal offence: <http://bit.ly/MkJt1j>
- Preventing and tackling bullying: new advice for schools: <http://bit.ly/LFUv4d>
- What can we learn from cases referred to the ISA?: <http://bit.ly/MhOVn6>

Consult the Experts

Our expert panel is available to support you in your role. Make the most of your subscription and get the expert support you need. Here's how our panel has helped other child protection coordinators recently:

What are the implications of the changes regarding supervised volunteers?
<http://bit.ly/MXkjc4>

The screenshot shows the Optimus Education website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Home, News, Support Services, Reference Zones, Consult the Experts, Conferences, Bookshop, and About Us. A search bar is also present. The main content area is titled 'Safeguarding' and features a 'Featured article' section with a photo of a child and text about 'Tackling self-harm in primary schools'. There are also sections for 'News', 'Consult the Experts', and 'Reference Zone'. The Reference Zone includes links to 'Up-to-date information on statutory duties and requirements', 'Safer recruitment', 'Safeguarding training', and 'Inspection of child protection'. On the right side, there are promotional boxes for 'Sign up for a free two week trial' and 'Sign up to our Free e-bulletins'. At the bottom, there are 'Related books' and 'Related conferences' sections.

In the Reference Zone, we stay on top of your changing legal obligations – helping you keep your policies up to date.

Here is a sample of the latest revisions:

- Allegations of abuse against staff: model policy <http://bit.ly/Qa6Bng>

www.optimus-education.com

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PROTECTING CHILDREN UPDATE

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Impact of Munro review recommendations

The DfE has published a report on the impact of local authority trials of flexible assessment practices that came out of the Munro Review of Child Protection. The review recommended reducing statutory guidance on safeguarding and the welfare of children in order to promote local autonomy and increase the scope for practitioners to exercise professional judgement.

Changes to single assessment forms seem to have been generally welcomed by practitioners as the less prescriptive format has also improved the narrative and flow of assessments.

Although trial authorities have been allowed greater flexibility, six out of eight opted to keep single assessment completion within 35 or 45 working days (in line with current statutory timescales for the completion of a core assessment or an initial and core assessment respectively).

Reduced prescription concerning timescales could produce more thorough assessments by enabling social workers to arrange visits at times that are convenient for children and families and allowing time to explore children's wishes and feelings. It also increases possibilities for additional visits to build rapport, and to collect and clarify information as well

more time for practitioners to review and reflect on cases.

However, there were mixed views on the impact that the trial had on time spent working directly with children and families. Practitioners felt that cases that would normally be quickly closed are taking longer to complete because the conclusion and write-up of less complex cases becomes a low priority. Also, while some social workers perceived that the single assessment reduced time spent on case recording, others thought that the flexibilities meant they were collecting more information, which then needed to be analysed and recorded. Delays in case closure also impact on case allocation and workflow. One professional pointed out that there is a perverse incentive for social workers to keep cases open because it helps resist being allocated more work.

So, while most social workers and managers were in favour of the single assessment and flexible timescales, delay and drift is an ever-present danger. Early supervisory input is critical to establish a realistic and child-centred timescale for completion of a proportionate assessment. *The Impact of More Flexible Assessment Practices* <http://bit.ly/OoRitG>

Gay pupils need support in school

Stonewall has published a report on young people's experience of homophobic bullying in schools. While levels of homophobic bullying have fallen by 10% since Stonewall's last report in 2007, there is little room for complacency. More than half (55%) of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people experience homophobic bullying in Britain's schools, with 99% hearing phrases such as 'that's so gay' in school.

Over half of gay pupils experience verbal homophobic bullying, almost one-quarter experience cyberbullying, and 16% experience physical abuse. Many of these young people who are bullied never tell anyone, and even when they do, in most cases it does nothing to stop the bullying.

Three out of five lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils who experience homophobic bullying say teachers who witness it never intervene and only 10% say that teachers challenge homophobic language every time they hear it. Only half of lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils report that their schools

say homophobic bullying is wrong – and only 37% of faith schools do so.

The report finds that homophobic bullying of gay pupils is lower in schools that explicitly state that homophobic bullying is wrong, and that gay pupils are much less likely to be bullied in schools that respond quickly to homophobic incidents. Gay pupils in these schools are three times more likely to feel their school is an accepting, tolerant place. In schools that have attempted to eliminate homophobic remarks, the incidence of homophobic bullying is just 37%, compared with 68% in schools where homophobic language is heard more frequently. Gay young people are much less likely to be bullied in schools that teach and address gay issues positively compared with schools that do so negatively.

Stonewall report: <http://bit.ly/OzHYO6>
Ofsted resource on a whole-school approach to tackling homophobic bullying: <http://bit.ly/OzI6NF>

Increase in private fostering

The number of children in private fostering arrangements (where a child is cared for by someone other than a parent or close relative) rose by 8% from 1,650 in March 2011 to 1,780 in March 2012, according to statistics published by the DfE. This represents an increase of 34% from 2008.

The number of arrangements starting in the 2012 financial year increased from 2,310 to 2,420, a 5% increase on the previous financial year (an increase of 55% since 2008). The number of arrangements ending in the 2012 financial year increased from 2,330 to 2,520, 8% higher than the previous financial year, and 66% higher than 2008).

Statistics on children accommodated in secure homes

The DfE has published new statistics on children accommodated in secure children's homes in England and Wales, for the year ending 31 March 2012.

On 31 March 2012, there were 300 approved places in England and Wales, a decrease of 4% from the previous year and a fall of 12% from 31 March 2008.

There were 239 children accommodated in secure children's homes (221 in England and 18 in Wales), a rise of 8% from 2011 but a 15% decrease from 2008; 80% of approved places in England and Wales were occupied, an increase of 10% from 2011.

In 2010 and 2011, there was a large decrease in the occupancy rate between 2010 and 2011, so the large increase between 2011 and 2012 brings figures back in line with 2008 to 2010. Two-thirds of the children within secure children's homes were male, a decrease from last year of three percentage points.

Statistics for accommodation in secure children's homes: <http://bit.ly/RoUNL7>

The DfE has also published statistics on child death reviews: <http://bit.ly/T6j2Aq>

Sexual exploitation: is it happening in your school?

It has been happening for centuries, and could even be present in your school in some form. Education safeguarding consultant [Ann Marie Christian](#) discusses sexual exploitation, and what schools can do to help

When I was a young person at school in Year 11, there were a few girls who were blatantly dating men in their early twenties. The men had cars and mopeds, and the girls felt very special and grown-up with no idea that they were being exploited; in fact, the word exploited wasn't really used by anyone to describe these relationships. The girls would show off their love bites and cheap gold rings given to them by these men, whisper or boast about their periods being late, and have regular pregnancy scares.

Young people today don't call it 'sexual exploitation' as they don't even realise it is happening to them. They think they are having a relationship; it's simply a game to play with older boys and men, or something to do to keep a relationship with them. Young people are bought gifts and told they are special. Dating older men sounds and feels exciting, and many girls feel they have to be secretive because their peers and families would frown on their actions and tell them they are being taken advantage of. Most of the girls believe that they are genuinely in love, and nobody can tell them otherwise.

In 1999, I was a school-based senior social worker in a secondary comprehensive school and there were loads of cases involving sexually exploited girls. From years 9 to 11 girls were very much at risk, and even some Year 7 girls were on the edge of involvement.

Case study one: self-blame for sexual exploitation

A very able Year 11 girl (12 GCSEs) disclosed after she attended my group session on self-esteem. She told me about a man who came to her home to fit a new kitchen. He was chatty and made her feel special and attractive. He even flirted with her, despite the fact that her mum was in the house at the time.

He managed to get the girl's mobile number (without her mum knowing!) and persuaded her to accept an invitation to his house to plait his hair. He texted her a few times, and she went to his house (obviously not expecting to have sex). He charmed and flattered her; no one had ever given her so much attention before. He started tickling and hugging her, and asked her if she trusted him – she said yes as she was enjoying his attention. He then pushed her on the bed and sexually assaulted her. She did not say 'sexually assault' – I did. She told me he had touched her body and they went on to have sex. She was a virgin and she felt uncomfortable about it afterwards, but did not realise she had been

Young people today don't call it 'sexual exploitation' as they don't even realise it is happening to them

taken advantage of! She blamed herself until I labelled it as child sexual exploitation.

I told her I had to inform her mum, and that she was not to blame as she had been coerced. Her mum blamed herself as she assumed this man was trustworthy because he came from a large high street shop, and appeared to be kind and friendly. The girl's mum had no idea about the flirting, and was shocked they had exchanged numbers and stayed in contact. After speaking to her mum, I referred the case to the police. She was 15 years old, and he was 26.

Case study two: disbelief of sexual exploitation

Another girl in the same school in Year 9 was dating her sister's boyfriend's younger brother. He was 24 and she was 14, but she had been dating him since she was 12 years old. He flirted with her for a period of time, then started texting her and arranged to meet her in the park by some swings. He told her he really liked her, and thought she was special and very grown-up for her age.

She was a very quiet girl from a middle-class family. Her father was an author, and her mother had her own business. Her sister had had a child with his brother, so they were in-laws. She was very much in love with him and couldn't see that he was taking advantage of her; she was convinced she was special and he was protecting her. I saw her for one-to-one sessions and she didn't tell me his age for a while; I had thought he was of a similar age as she was very convincing.

Eventually, she told me his age and the 'in-law' connection. She came to understand from our discussions that he was tricking her, and she told me that he had an 'official' girlfriend of a similar age to him. She was very jealous about this other girl and hated seeing the two together, but this made her want him more. This case was also referred to the police and told to her parents (who were horrified), but she did not cooperate and retracted her statements as she said she was still in love with him.

Recognising the signs

Schools see children five days a week and watch them grow up through early years, and then into adolescence. This regular contact with children and young people gives schools the opportunity to take positive action. Schools need to be extremely vigilant to understand and recognise the early indicators that young people are at risk of sexual exploitation. These are some things to watch for:

- It might start with minor disruption, truanting, mixing with the 'naughty' crowd, associating with older young people in and out of school.
- It may then develop into lying about their whereabouts, being late home and arriving late to school – sometimes leaving home very early for school and still arriving late at school.
- Their behaviour may change – they may become withdrawn and silent and appear preoccupied. They may become so focused on the older 'boyfriend' that they cannot concentrate.
- They may tell their parents they are on a sleepover at their friend's house when actually they are out with an older man.
- They may end up staying out with someone in a hotel, B&B, or at a mate's house where a bed is easily accessible. The older boy/man may not want his partner to find out and will not want to be traced.
- Once the girls are trapped in by the older boy's/man's attention they are given lots of demands:
 - * skipping school to meet in the daytime (so no one gets suspicious)
 - * substance misuse (to make them feel relaxed so they can accept their sexual advances)
 - * carrying/transporting drugs (girls in uniform are less likely to be associated with drugs).

All girls are at risk, but some girls are seen as being easier targets:

- girls from strict families, as they are tempted by the sense of fun and secrecy
- girls who have special educational needs, as they may have low self-esteem and are less likely to challenge requests
- girls for whom English is a second language, as they may be desperate to blend in
- girls who do not fit a popular, cultural stereotype of beauty, as they can often feel left out and unattractive – being pursued by someone older can be flattering and great for the ego.

Case study three: sexual exploitation among boys

It is important to remember that boys are also at risk of sexual exploitation. A Year 9 boy was befriended by an older man who appeared to be very trustworthy. The man listened to him and welcomed him into his group of friends. The boy was given cigarettes, alcohol, credit on his new phone, clothes, trainers and even a PlayStation. He was invited to the man's home and stayed late, enjoying the relaxed environment with no boundaries or rules. He ended up staying over as it was too late to set off for home, and the older man couldn't drive because he'd had too much to drink. The boy was offered the sofa and encouraged to sleep in his underwear. It developed from there.

In my experience, these boys rarely disclose, but their behaviours give strong clues, such as aggressive, offending or anti-social behaviour, absconding, self-harming, drug and alcohol dependency, and so on. These boys may end up in the Youth Justice Service and at PRUs.

Many young people will confide in a close friend, so it is important to establish a clear, 'whistleblowing policy' for young people to raise concerns about each other

The school's role

School-based staff are in a good position to pick up on early signs and indicators. They can pull all their suspicions together and share their concerns with parents, children's social care and the police.

Many young people will confide in a close friend, so it is important to establish a clear, 'whistleblowing policy' for young people to raise concerns about each other. Identify key members of staff whom young people can talk to in confidence if they are concerned about a friend. School councils are best placed to develop such a policy and ensure that it is well advertised around school.

We need to teach our young people life skills, including recognising when someone is taking advantage of them. We must help them to understand the difference between a healthy, genuine relationship and one that is coercive.

Use some of the resources available online, including short videos to get a discussion going. The The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre's 'ThinkUKnow' site is excellent for this. There is also the 'My Dangerous Loverboy' website, and the government's own site, 'This is ABUSE'.

Find out about local services for sexually exploited young people, and invite representatives to your school. Many such services will have a ready-prepared set of resources that schools can use.

Sexual exploitation doesn't just happen in certain locations, and isn't always perpetrated by certain types of men. In all three case studies above, the perpetrators were white and 'respectable'.

Have a look at the websites listed below, and get cracking!

- www.thinkuknow.co.uk is full of resources including short videos and lesson plans
- www.mydangerousloverboy.com tells the story of a young woman whose boyfriend sells her for sex
- <http://thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk> is designed to help young people recognise abusive relationships and their right to say 'no'.

New briefings on neglect and grooming

The NSPCC has published two new briefings for schools on safeguarding - one on neglect and another on grooming.

The briefing on neglect states that staff need regular quality training and support to understand the nature and effects of neglect, so that they have the confidence to respond when they have concerns. Neglect can often be an indicator of further maltreatment and is often identified as an issue in serious case reviews as being present in circumstances leading to the death of the child or young person. Neglect can affect the child's perception of themselves and the way others behave towards them; these children find it difficult to form relationships and, particularly in school, this can lead to bullying. They often have poor attendance, and consequently low attainment.

The briefing on protecting children and young people from grooming and entrapment points out that, by having a better understanding of the behaviour of sexual offenders, schools are better placed to put a number of obstacles in their way. Some believe that sexual abuse by teachers has dynamics similar to incest.

Both briefings can be found at: <http://bit.ly/OjkAGG>

Outstanding safeguarding: we did it!

Chingford Foundation School has just been awarded 'outstanding' for safeguarding - deputy headteacher **Carol Smith** explains how they achieved it

I've made a stand by refusing to write one single, all-covering safeguarding policy. Safeguarding should permeate every aspect of school life, and policy should underpin practice in any sphere to ensure consistency of approach and standards. To achieve this we have developed a suite of policies formulated around a safeguarding statement that is included in each. The policies include:

- child protection
- confidentiality
- one-to-one working
- children in care
- educational visits
- safer recruitment
- equality (all types)
- disability duty.

The risk with any policy is that after it is written, the 'box is ticked' and the policy is placed on a shelf to gather dust. I display hard copies of the whole suite of safeguarding policies in the staffroom on a freestanding magazine rack - I call it the 'safeguarding resource centre'. Being so visible and readily available to staff makes it more likely that staff will read them. For instance, a form tutor with a new tutee who is in care will look at the children in care policy which is two sides of A4. I firmly believe that a *War and Peace*-sized safeguarding policy with a long index would never be touched by staff!

Some of the policies in our suite may seem out of the ordinary, but they help to ensure a consistent approach to safeguarding throughout the school. For instance, the educational visits policy often goes unnoticed in schools as a vehicle to support outstanding safeguarding practice. The recruitment policy would not have been seen as part of safeguarding at one time, but following the Bichard Inquiry Report it is now a necessary component.

Involving social work students

Coming from a different discipline and an entirely different training background and working environment, I have long found social workers difficult to understand - and they me!

Rather than wallow in the differences, I took an opportunity offered by a social-work-trained colleague who managed a range of collaborative activities in our partnership of schools. We went to Brunel University to hear of a project in Brent that involved social work students spending one of their practice placements in a school.

Working with London Metropolitan University, I piloted having a social work student in a secondary setting in my borough. Four students later and with more students now placed borough-wide, we are building greater understanding of each other's

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work practice. The students complement the work of school staff, bringing an extra dimension to supporting our most vulnerable pupils.

Each year, as part of the opportunities for each student to meet the competencies required within the practice placement module, I set a piece of research-heavy work which culminates in a presentation to governors. Our one-to-one working policy was written as such an assignment; another has been a review and explanation of the work of all professionals who support our most vulnerable pupils (internal and external to the school) and how their work interrelates.

Working with the governors

There are many reasons why it is important that the lead person for safeguarding is a senior colleague, not least of which is to have both the confidence to liaise with governors and the openings to do so.

Our safeguarding team (four colleagues: three teachers and one very experienced member of support staff) is aided and challenged by a parent governor who has taken on the role of safeguarding governor. This is a key role - she asks me to evidence any evaluation judgements I make about any aspect of our safeguarding work, samples correspondence, shadows meetings and expects termly reports. She reports to full governors regularly and keeps me on my toes; in doing so, she was well prepared for her own Ofsted interview!

We were lucky that the governor who volunteered for this role was just the right person for the job. If I were to join another school, I would write a person specification for the role of safeguarding governor. I would also explain to the governing body what being a good safeguarding governor entails, and outline how I would work with and support that post holder.

I have held safeguarding training for all governors; this was the full staff training with a 'what governors need to do' section at the end. Over and above ensuring that the named governor is in place, I challenged them to be aware of the range of school trips we run, to scrutinise the work of the lead person for safeguarding and the educational visits coordinator, to visit during the school day as often as possible, to sample risk assessments for the ordinary and special activities of the school, and to oversee robust safer recruitment procedures. This helped our governing body to realise that safeguarding truly permeates everything the school does.

Training school staff

All our school staff wear photo ID lanyards with our CRB number on them, and, as with most schools, we have a robust Single Central Record.

Following a detailed training in September 2009,

I now provide a detailed training only for staff new to the school each September, alongside a briefer training with a practical workshop for all continuing staff. Thus, I ensure that everyone has annual training, but there is an element of differentiation and no repetition because I change the brief training and workshop annually.

But, what is the best way to engage staff in full safeguarding training?

Almost everyone will know about the Soham murders, so make a brief reference to the Bichard Inquiry Report and how those dreadful murders could have been prevented if the safer recruitment procedures we have in place now, and the centralisation and accessibility of certain records, had been available then. I follow this with a child protection workshop, promoting discussion.

I also present scenarios for discussion to determine which should be referred to social services or police, and which can be dealt with internally. This exercise shows the variety of child protection work in a school, and shows why the child protection staff have so much training. It can be built on by explaining that child protection is just one small part of safeguarding.

During the year, I train new staff who join the school, including PGCE students, and I give broader training to GTP students and NQTs who have attended my full training. I give an in-depth look at multi-agency working to support vulnerable children in general.

At any one point in time, several of our staff will be undertaking further study (such as teaching assistants for NVQ level 3 or foundation degrees), and I tailor further training to each individual as required.

Keeping the leadership team informed

To keep the leadership group informed of the team's work, and discuss safeguarding issues of interest, I circulate the results of an audit of policy and practice in February and October each year. The same audit is included on the agenda of the appropriate governing body committee, and, of course, I justify every statement in it to the ever-vigilant safeguarding governor!

Creating a safe ethos for pupils

How do we help pupils to safeguard each other effectively? It begins with meeting pupils in their own primary schools in Year 6 and instilling our ethos that we all care about each other and are responsible for each other.

Reputation is an interesting phenomenon with regard to safeguarding. While I have a reputation for complaining in the firmest of terms when external agencies don't serve our pupils and families well, I also have a reputation among the pupils that nothing shocks me (mental note: new lead persons for safeguarding should enrol for acting classes!). This is true of the whole team; if a pupil comes to see us because of an issue and we are unshockable, non-judgemental, reassuring, providing facts and giving appropriate support, this is the kind of thing

a teenager will tell their close friends. It also provides another route through which a needy child can hear that it's not only all right to speak to the team, but that things can be sorted out and improved.

Our school has drop days and events, within an off-timetable 'enhancement week' in July and during the year. Our ICT staff will be teaching about appropriate use of the internet, but visiting speakers are more memorable and can cover more ground, and I would advocate such direct teaching on a variety of areas linked with safeguarding. We schedule a 'relationships day' in Year 8 that focuses on all aspects of relationships including cyber-relationships, personal safety (the police and Transport for London have supported us here) and personal development (the Army ART teams are excellent).

The overriding principle in equipping pupils to safeguard themselves and each other is to help them to understand themselves, their strengths and their limitations, teaching them not to take things at face value – especially in social networking.

Promoting teamwork

I've mentioned our safeguarding team, and in a large school this group is vital. However, even in the smallest school I would advocate that a minimum of two colleagues be trained to safeguarding lead level – not just to cover for absence, but to discuss cases and formulate action plans. Although a colleague on our safeguarding team may take a lead on a case, we always discuss each case with at least one other team member on the day it presents. We meet regularly on Friday in a timetabled meeting, which is sacrosanct. We inform each other about activity on cases, meetings attended, forthcoming meetings where we may need a colleague to deputise, etc.

Friday cases

Have you noticed how many new child protection cases commence on a Friday? It isn't really surprising as the child has spent all week rehearsing in their mind what the weekend is going to be like at home, at Gran's, at the caravan, etc.; just when it is really close and the child can't face another weekend, they speak out, burst into tears, hide in the toilets, cut their arm.

Friday, especially before a school holiday, is when safeguarding always cranks up a gear. Be assertive and insist on timetabled safeguarding time on Friday afternoon; you are no good to your school community if you have taken all the worry of unfinished business home over the weekend and had no sleep. If you are a classroom teacher as well as DSP, insist on your class being covered by the PPA teacher in addition to your PPA.

Invest in outstanding safeguarding

Safeguarding needs investment in training, of time, and of your creativity. It isn't sitting and waiting for child protection cases to come knocking at your door. It can wear you out and wear you down, but it will be very worthwhile.

If you and your team do get a reputation for being approachable, unshockable and non-judgemental, those pupils in need of your expertise will come through the door

See the full Bichard Inquiry Report here: <http://bit.ly/OXIEBs>

Surviving a child protection conference

Tim Barker has chaired child protection conferences for many years. Here, he explains the role of the school in case conferences, and shares his top tips on preparing for and participating in them to get the best result for the child concerned

During my career with children's services, I have chaired (literally!) thousands of child protection conferences. However, I appreciate that for many teachers attending a child protection conference is a rarity, and the experience can seem unfamiliar, confusing and possibly scary.

The best way to approach this is to remember that a child protection conference is a meeting, albeit one with its particular rules and structure. As with any other meeting, once you know what to expect and what is expected of you, the better prepared you will be and more able to make a valuable contribution.

The role of the school can be vital – with the exception of the family, no one spends more time with the child than the classroom teacher and teaching assistants.

Preparing for the conference

It is important to be clear about the purpose and remit of the conference. For the purpose of this article I will be talking about an initial conference, but most of it will apply equally to reviews.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2010) explains that the conference brings together family members and professionals in order to:

- bring together and analyse information about the child's needs and the parents' capacity to meet those needs
- make judgements about whether the child is suffering significant harm and about the likelihood of the child suffering significant harm in future
- decide what action is needed to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

The conference therefore looks back at what has happened, considers the current situation and looks forward to what needs to happen in future, and you will have a role to play in each of these areas.

Sort out the details

The agenda for the conference will be set by the LSCB, and if this is your first conference it will be very helpful to get hold of a copy in advance as it will give you a good idea of the order of events and where you will be expected to contribute.

Another practical thing you can do to prepare is to make sure you know where the conference is taking place (this will be on the invitation), and be clear about parking arrangements. This may sound very basic, but no one can be at their best if they arrive late and flustered because of parking problems – it does happen!

The conference therefore looks back at what has happened, considers the current situation and looks forward to what needs to happen in future, and you will have a role to play in each of these areas

Prepare the report

However, the most important aspect of preparation is putting together the information you will be presenting. Increasingly, the expectation is for all agencies to provide a written report and I would always recommend this; it enables you to say exactly what you want. The LSCB may specify a format for reports, so check this if you are unsure.

In preparing your written report, or your verbal submission if a written report is not expected, you need to bear in mind that it will be available to family members as well as fellow professionals. This does not mean that you should pull your punches or not be honest about your concerns, even if these reflect badly on the parents/carers. However, it does mean that you should think about how you express yourself; as *Working Together* advises, you should 'take care to distinguish between fact, observation, allegation and opinion'. Specific examples to illustrate your points are always helpful.

In my experience, concerns about how parents will react to criticism are usually exaggerated. Most parents recognise by the time they get to conference that something is wrong, and they need to hear the honest views of professionals. At the same time, a balanced approach is needed, and positive aspects should always be drawn out as well.

It is important that your report pulls together information from all the staff who work with the child to ensure that you are reporting a full picture. If you are unsure about whether or not to put something in your report (such include third-party information, or something one parent has said that the other parent may not be aware of), the best advice is to talk to the chair in advance. Chairs are well aware of such issues, and have wide discretion in dealing with them.

Decide who will attend

Usually there will only be one staff member representing the school, and this should be the DSP. If the DSP cannot attend, or where it is felt more useful for another person to go because of their relationship with/knowledge of the child and family, the person attending must be able to commit resources. If you are not the DSP and have been asked to attend a conference, you must discuss it with the DSP and or the management team to ensure that you are able to make decisions on behalf of the school.

Attending the conference

Once everyone is seated in the conference room, the chair will invite all those present to introduce

themselves and will draw attention to the agenda. Agendas vary in detail, but there will be three general phases to the meeting.

Phase 1: information-gathering

Usually, the social worker will present their report first, followed by the other agencies. The chair decides how and in what order reports are presented. Opportunities are given for both family and other agencies to ask questions for clarification.

Phase 2: decision-making

Once the chair has decided that all relevant information is available and has been shared, the professionals will need to decide whether there is a need for a child protection plan. The chair will normally outline the relevant criteria, and may well summarise the key information. The key question to answer is whether the child is likely to suffer significant harm in future. According to *Working Together*, the test is either:

- professional judgement is that further ill-treatment or impairment are likely, if the child can be shown to have suffered ill-treatment or impairment of health or development as a result of abuse or neglect; or
- professional judgement is that ill-treatment or impairment as a result of abuse/neglect are likely, based on findings in this case or on research evidence. (This is to cover cases where significant harm has not yet taken place, but action is needed to prevent it happening.)

The thing to remember is that the chair will expect you to give a professional opinion, and will take a dim view of anyone who declines to give it. The point of this is that the decision needs to be seen as a joint responsibility of all professionals, and to be understood as such by the family.

The parents need to know very clearly that they are both part of the problem and part of the solution. It can be difficult to say in front of a parent that you think the child should be made subject of a child protection plan; however, the child's needs are paramount and the conference must be honest with the parent from the start. Honesty at this phase can really help the next one, which is developing the child protection plan.

Phase 3: developing the plan

Essentially, the child protection plan is a plan of action. It sets out what needs to change in order to safeguard the child, agreeing who will need to do what and within what time frame. The plan includes clear statements about how and by whom the plan will be monitored to ensure it is working properly.

The role played by the school will vary from case to case. Often it will consist of monitoring, such as ensuring that school attendance is up to an agreed standard and reporting any concerns to the lead social worker, or checking that the child arrives at school properly fed and clothed.

The lead worker will always be a social worker,

All those attending need to contribute to the best of their ability if children are to be properly protected, and their interests promoted

reflecting the primary role of children's social services in safeguarding children. However, he or she will be supported by a core group of professionals, whose role is to develop and implement the child protection plan as a detailed working tool, and to meet regularly to review progress with the family to ensure that agreed actions are being carried out.

With school-age children, it is usual for the school to be represented in this core group; school-based staff need to be clear in advance that they are able to commit to attend core group meetings. In many LAs, finding a regular venue to hold core group meetings can be quite an issue, and the school is often suggested as it can be both accessible for family members and a non-threatening environment (compared to a social services office). It is important to clarify whether this is a facility your school can offer.

Reviewing the conference minutes

When you receive the minutes of the conference, check carefully that they represent what you said and agreed to. While the minutes are not verbatim, they should include – as *Working Together* says – ‘a summary of discussion at the conference, which accurately reflects contributions made’. If you have any concerns about the accuracy of the minutes, you should take these up with the chair as soon as possible.

Child protection conferences are a vital part of the safeguarding system. All those attending need to contribute to the best of their ability if children are to be properly protected, and their interests promoted.

You can access *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2010)* at this link: <http://bit.ly/pkmsTu>

Social worker workload

Community Care has published results of a survey of social workers' workload, which show that 58% said their caseloads had increased over the past 12 months and half had seen at least one colleague leave their team over the past 12 months due to high caseloads.

The average number of cases held across the UK ranges from 11 for students to 30 for social workers with management responsibility. However, one newly qualified children's social worker reported holding 41 cases because of sickness absence in the team.

Ruth Cartwright, England manager of the British Association of Social Workers said: 'Morale in the profession is generally at a low ebb and that can be seen in sickness absence rates.'

Read the report at: <http://bit.ly/NUBTMR>

New learning from serious case reviews: a two-year report for 2009-2011

Researchers from both the University of East Anglia and the University of Warwick have published the sixth two-yearly national analysis of serious case reviews.

Jenni Whitehead gives an overview of the findings of this research

Marian Brandon, Peter Sidebotham, Sue Bailey, Pippa Belderson, Caro Hawley, Catherine Ellis and Matthew Megson are the authors of a report that looks at serious case reviews over a two-year period (from 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2011). They have formed the research team for four of the six reports like this that have been published, so they have a really good sense of what the research is telling us over a number of years.

One aspect to note is that this 2009-11 report put more focus on cases involving children aged 5-10. The concentration on this age group also highlighted issues of hidden adversity, including the risks of harm to children associated with parental suicide or parental self-harming behaviour, and the potential adverse effects on children linked with parental separation.

Child deaths

The research estimates a total number of violent and maltreatment related deaths in England to be 85 per year. Of these, 50-55 deaths are directly caused by violence, abuse or neglect and a further 30-35 in which maltreatment was considered to be a contributory factor.

The rate of serious case reviews relating to fatal cases has remained stable over the last five years. There has, however, been a significant drop in serious case reviews as a whole over the two-year period examined by this research – from 280 for the period 2007-2009 to 184 for this study looking at 2009-2011.

The highest risk of fatal abuse is in infancy; however, there is a second peak in adolescence. An interesting finding is that while just over one-third of serious case reviews examined concerned a baby under 12 months old, this is a 10% drop from the previous six studies in this series. It is difficult to understand what this drop means – it may just mean that where a case hasn't resulted in the death of a baby, the safeguarding board has decided that a serious case review is not needed, or that the case has been examined by the statutory child death overview processes that have been running since 2008. On a more positive note, it could be that the awareness of the extreme vulnerability of babies is being taken on board by professionals, and that earlier intervention is taking place.

The authors make the point that while overall numbers of children dying as a direct consequence of maltreatment may be small, many more children and young people suffer from lower levels of abuse

or neglect. We need to learn from the experiences of all the children reported on to ensure that lessons are learned to improve working practice for present and future cases.

The effect of neglect

This report offers a clearer understanding of the extent to which neglect features in serious case reviews. Neglect was the primary reason for carrying out a serious case review in 11% of the non-fatal cases; however neglect featured in 58% of other non-fatal cases, including cases where physical or sexual abuse had been the primary reason for carrying out a review. While neglect is uncommon as the primary cause of death, it is a notable feature in deaths not directly caused by maltreatment. For instance, past or present neglect was evident in 11 out of the 14 suicides reported on in this study.

This prevalence of neglect in cases that end up subject to serious case reviews should act as a warning to all professionals, not least school-based staff. Neglect is an area that schools and children's social care have the most difficulty reaching an agreement on. I have more conversations with children's social care about cases that schools identify as neglect, therefore warranting a child protection intervention and the advice to undertake a CAF, than I do about any other category of abuse. There are just too many let-out clauses with neglect: a need for parenting classes, help with housing, help with managing money and household chores, help with mental health issues, etc.

The message here is to be persistent. If in your professional judgement the child is neglected, stick firm with this view!

Cases involving five- to 10-year-olds

Of the overview reports from serious case reviews examined in this study, 21 were of children aged between five and 10. This is the age group between infancy and adolescence – the two peak ages in respect of the likelihood of a case resulting in a serious case review. The research found very few distinct features that could be linked to children in this age group, but many similarities with other age groups were evident. This diversity of cases makes it difficult to see patterns that help us to recognise significant warning signals.

Concerns harder to spot?

The children in this age group are seen regularly in schools, and when they present well in schools

The prevalence of neglect in cases that end up subject to serious case reviews should act as a warning to all professionals, not least school-based staff

professionals may be unaware of underlying concerns. The research suggests that schools have less understanding of the circumstances of children in this age group outside the school environment:

‘There tends to be little direct professional engagement with the parents or the home environment. Indicators of physical and emotional harm may be harder to detect in this age group. Children who are experiencing neglectful or abusive home environments may not stand out as being any different from their peers, or may present with otherwise non-specific emotional or behavioural indicators.’

I find the statement above really hard to understand or take on board, as my personal experience is that I get more calls from primary schools than from secondary schools. The report goes on to say that staff in universal services need to be more alert to this and be aware of the limitations of only seeing children in the ‘safety’ of the school environment. Again, this is difficult to understand as most primary schools do have home school liaison staff who, presumably, see children and their families on a regular basis. Perhaps it suggests that named persons for child protection should make stronger links with those staff who do visit children in their own homes.

It may be that in infancy there are more opportunities to see children in their own homes. Health visitors and early years practitioners are likely to have developed a stronger ‘Think Family’ ethos than exists in schools. It may also indicate that by the time the abused child reaches school age, they have learned to keep quiet about their home life.

The report suggests that any worrying behaviour, such as truanting, stealing food or running away, should be taken very seriously and that staff should make attempts to understand such behaviour within the context of the child’s home environment.

Parental mental health problems

Parental mental health problems featured highly within these cases, and suicidal or self-harming behaviour was particularly prominent. This sort of behaviour should be taken very seriously because of the effect and risks it poses to children.

For instance, there have been cases where the parent has committed suicide after killing their children for fear of leaving them unprotected in what they perceive to be a hostile world. The research explains that being a parent is usually a protective factor in relation to adult suicide or self-harm; thus when a parent is threatening or actually carrying out such behaviours, this protective element may have been lost.

A number of recent high-profile cases have highlighted the importance of adult services and children’s services working together to protect children after findings that suggest a lack of communication between the two.

The separation of parents was found to be a significant factor in the lives of children in this

Any worrying behaviour, such as truanting, stealing food or running away, should be taken very seriously

age group. Domestic violence featured highly in this age group, and the research found that separation from a violent partner did not necessarily mean that the threat of violence stopped.

Some of the cases examined showed that acrimonious separations can sometimes present direct risks to children’s safety and welfare, including the risk of homicide. The study found that children living with domestic abuse between their parents suffered emotional harm, and in some cases the violence spilled over onto the children caught in the middle of ongoing conflict.

Agency responses

The research reports on whether the children were known to children’s social care at the time of the incident that led to a serious case review:

- 18 (10%) of the children had a child protection plan – a marked drop since the previous two reviews, in a period when the number of children with a child protection plan has been steadily rising
- 42%, less than half of the children and families, were receiving a service from children’s social care
- 23% of cases had had previous involvement with children’s social care, but the case had been closed – sometimes because of non-cooperation
- in 14% of cases, referrals were made but not accepted
- 21% of the children had never been referred to children’s social care.

The drop in children who are the subject of a child protection plan at the point of the incident causing a serious case review is perhaps the one positive finding out of the statistics given above. There has been an increase in child protection plans, but a 10% drop in the number of children on a child protection plan coming to the attention of a serious case review does suggest that those children on a child protection plan are being better protected.

Problems with non-cooperation

The rest of the statistics show a worrying picture. In 23% of cases there had been involvement with children’s social care but the case had been closed, sometimes because of non-cooperation. If parents do not cooperate with children’s social care, I think most people would view their reluctance as a reason for increased concern rather than a reason to close a case. I have heard of cases being closed when parents refuse to cooperate in the past, but I thought we had all moved on from that.

In 14% of cases, professionals tried to refer the case to children’s social care but the referral had not been accepted. The report implies that this indicates thresholds to children’s social care are too high. It has been suggested by the Munro report that universal services sometimes exaggerate issues in order to get a referral accepted

(I have always argued that this is nonsense). However, I think that there are many cases that demand a great deal of perseverance on the part of the referrer in order to get them accepted as child protection referrals. How many times have you heard, 'Do a CAF', when in your professional judgement the situation warrants at the very least an initial assessment and possibly a section 47 investigation?

At the point of the incident that caused a serious case review to be undertaken, 58% of the cases were not in receipt of a service from children's social care. This means that for 58% of the cases, universal services were playing the role of the 'frontline' for these families.

Previous reports from this same research team have shown similar figures of cases where there was no present involvement from children's social care. The question is, do we really recognise ourselves as the frontline for protecting children?

Supporting young mothers

Almost 60% of the mothers in these serious case reviews were under 21 years of age when they had their first child. Some of these young women may have entered pregnancy while still attending school. Although this group's vulnerability has been recognised, we need to acknowledge that this vulnerability can be lasting and that there may be cumulative stresses and risks of harm when these young first-time mothers go on to have more children.

I have read a number of serious case summary reports where the mother of the child(ren) has been under 18, and therefore defined as a child by the Children Act 1989. I remember in one case having lengthy discussions about how the mother's status as a child could best be reflected and reported on in the serious case review.

These findings should alert us to the need for very good support for young mothers, and child protection training for those staff supporting them.

Working with disabled children

The vulnerability of disabled children is recognised, and was a feature in 12% of these serious case reviews. However, the risk of harm went unrecognised in these cases, sometimes where the family presented as loving and cooperative.

It is of great concern that the research found that there was a tendency to see the disability more clearly than the child. For instance, workers may have accepted lower standards of parenting than would be tolerated for a non-disabled child, such as keeping a child locked in their bedroom for long periods of time for 'safety' reasons.

Disabled children who have communication differences or difficulties need workers who go out of their way to listen and understand the child, and the report states that the onus on communicating with such children should be on the practitioner – not the child.

The question is, do we really recognise ourselves as the frontline for protecting children?

Understanding child development

A large number of the cases and how they were managed suggested a serious lack of knowledge about basic child development. This lack of knowledge applied to teachers as well as social workers, and some health professionals. In respect of teachers, the research found that primary school teachers receive very limited child development input throughout their qualifying courses, and secondary teachers will typically get none.

An understanding of normal motor development in childhood is an essential basis for evaluating the significance of bruising, and deciding whether the injury is suspicious and should be referred.

With older children, the research suggests that professionals need to understand their developmental pathway over time. Professionals who did not get to know the young person or develop a relationship with them paid insufficient attention to the impact of maltreatment on their development.

Difficult behaviour is one example – the behaviour is seen as the problem rather than trying to understand the root cause. On the other hand, the cases examined showed that where young people presented with pockets of good development, professionals tended to see this as a signal of resilience.

Common problems in professional practice

The report lists a number of traps that professionals can find themselves in, including:

- finding reasons to believe that unrealistic explanations for injury such as bruises were plausible, and not questioning or challenging such explanations with sufficient curiosity
- remaining disconnected with the child – not paying enough attention to the child's emotional state or development, and not exploring what it's like for the child living in their family or beyond the school gate
- seeing the disability and not the child, and rationalising the parents' behaviour towards the child as 'understandable'
- holding back from knowing the child as a person.

The lack of meaningful, reflective supervision comes up in almost all serious case reviews. This study calls for professionals and their managers to look at their present offer of supervision. Is it offered at all, is it reflective, and does it cover child protection issues and concerns on a regular basis? Who provides supervision to the named person in school?

I have only just scratched the surface of this research, but have tried to pull out some of the major issues for practice. The full report is well worth a read, and can be downloaded from the DFE website at: <http://bit.ly/NX2prD>