



# SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

WITH DR SANDRA WISEMAN

TUESDAY 7TH OCTOBER 2025 • ISSUE 150

## Understanding and supporting children who return to care

Recent research (the "Family Routes" study) has shed light on a group of children many schools may rarely consider: those who, after being adopted or placed under a special guardianship arrangement, later return to the care system. While this is relatively uncommon, the findings carry important lessons for how schools support stability, wellbeing, and inclusion.

### What did the study find?

- Children who have returned to care often face multiple challenges (mental health, behavioural needs, identity issues, attachment) and frequently undergo further placement changes.
- Disruptions are more likely in special guardianship arrangements than in adoptions, though breaks in adoptive placements are often linked to more complex needs.
- Many returns to care happen during adolescence, a time already marked by emotional, social, and developmental changes.
- Schools and education services often are involved in early referrals or support pathways before disruption.

### Why it matters in school

Children who have returned to care may carry a legacy of trauma and instability. Without sensitive support, their educational engagement, attendance, behaviour, and relationships may be adversely affected. Yet, with a thoughtful, relational, trauma-informed approach, schools can offer a stabilizing environment and a "safe base" across challenging times.

### What do schools need to do

- **Strengthen early vigilance** – Spot signs of distress, disengagement, or emotional struggle, and to work with external agencies when needed.
- **Maintaining continuity of relationships and support** – Provide consistent pastoral care, reduce unnecessary transitions, and offer mentoring or "trusted adult" relationships.
- **Using trauma-aware strategies** – Train staff to understand triggers, use de-escalation, and adapt expectations sensitively.
- **Collaborate** with families, social care, and mental health services to provide a joined-up, consistent response.
- **Provide an inclusive, compassionate culture** – All pupils, no matter their background or experiences, should feel valued, seen, and supported.

### Read:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-routes-children-who-returned-to-care>

## Children as victims in their own right: What schools need to know

The Government has published its response to the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's report *Victims in Their Own Right?*, which focused on the experiences of babies, children and young people living with domestic abuse. The response confirms that children are now legally recognised as victims of domestic abuse in their own right, not just witnesses, when they see, hear or are otherwise impacted by abuse in the home.

This shift matters for education: schools and colleges are often the first place where the impact of domestic abuse is visible, and staff are well placed to provide support, early identification and safe referral.

### Key messages for schools

- **Recognition of children as victims** - Schools must understand that children affected by domestic abuse should be considered victims in their own right. This recognition should inform safeguarding policies, training, and practice.
- **Training and professional awareness** - The Government has committed to improving training for frontline professionals, including education staff, to ensure they can spot the signs of abuse, understand the impact on learning and wellbeing, and respond appropriately.
- **Role of schools** - Young people themselves highlighted that they want schools to play a greater role in providing support. Schools are seen as trusted environments where children may disclose experiences or show signs of distress.
- **Child voice and agency** - The response highlights the importance of listening to children's views. Schools should consider how to involve children in decisions about the support they receive, and ensure they feel heard and respected.
- **Multi-agency working** - Effective support requires joined-up working between schools, social care, health, and specialist domestic abuse services. Schools should ensure clear processes for referrals and information sharing, while respecting confidentiality.
- **Curriculum and prevention** - Schools are encouraged to use PSHE/RSE to teach about healthy relationships, respect, and safety in age-appropriate ways, helping to prevent abuse and give children the language to talk about their experiences.

### Why this matters for education

Exposure to domestic abuse can have a profound effect on children's mental health, behaviour, attendance, attainment, and relationships. Schools have a crucial role in providing stability, spotting early signs of harm, and connecting children to the right support.

By embedding trauma-informed practice, strengthening safeguarding systems, and ensuring staff understand the new recognition of children as victims, schools can help make sure that no child feels invisible in their experience of domestic abuse.

### Read:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-report-victims-in-their-own-right>

## Hidden danger: AI-generated child sexual abuse images and what schools must know

A recent alert from the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) has revealed a deeply disturbing development: AI-generated child sexual abuse imagery is now appearing via hidden chatbot websites that simulate indecent fantasies involving children. This marks a new frontier in online harm and schools need to be aware.

### What has been discovered

- For the first time, IWF has identified imagery of child sexual abuse directly connected to AI chatbots that enable users to generate sexualised content involving children.
- These chatbots present "characters" or scenarios that simulate sexual fantasies with under-age avatars, and in some cases the user can expand or trigger explicit imagery.
- AI tools are being misused both to "nudeify" real images of children, and to generate wholly synthetic images or videos of abuse.
- The pace is alarming: in the first half of 2025, IWF confirmed 1,286 AI-generated videos of child sexual abuse, many so realistic they must be treated legally as though they are genuine footage.
- Some of these videos depict the most extreme offences (penetration, torture, bestiality).
- Because of advances in AI, many images and videos now blur the line between synthetic and real, making detection and moderation much harder.

This is not a hypothetical threat: tools are already being used, and the scale is rising rapidly.

### Why this matters to schools

Schools must recognise that this is a new and dangerous dimension of online abuse. Some of the reasons:

- **Revictimisation of real children** - Even if images are synthetic, they often incorporate likenesses of real children (or are based on real images). This perpetuates harm to victims, extending trauma.
- **Grooming, blackmail and coercion** - Criminals may use synthetic content to coerce, groom or manipulate children, for example threatening to share AI-generated images unless demands are met.
- **Peer misuse within the school community** - Pupils might misuse AI tools (from apps, websites or social media plugins) to generate sexualised images of peer, turning "harmless fun" into serious abuse.
- **Blurred boundaries and digital literacy risk** - Children may find it difficult to distinguish what's "real" from what's AI-generated. They may be manipulated by content they believe to be genuine.
- **Safeguarding and legal complexity** - Synthetic images of child sexual abuse are criminal under UK law (treated as equivalent to real images) when they depict or simulate minors sexually.
- **Role of the school in early identification** - Often signs show in behaviour, emotional state, social media interactions or disclosures. Schools are frontline in spotting distress, digital harm or disclosure risks.

### Read:

<https://www.iwf.org.uk/news-media/news/disturbing-ai-generated-child-sexual-abuse-images-found-on-hidden-chatbot-website-that-simulates-indecent-fantasies/>

## Schools see increasing domestic aggression: Urgent implications for educators

UK schools and education communities are facing a growing concern: more parents and carers are seeking help for their children's violent behaviour towards them. According to a new report by Action for Children, demand for support via the "Parent Talk" service has surged, with unmet needs, especially around mental health, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and school transitions playing a big role. Here's what schools need to know and do.

### What the report found

- **51%** rise in parents using the Parent Talk article "Dealing with violent behaviour from your child or teenager", comparing data since 2022.
- The service supports children aged 0-19 and supports neurodivergent or disabled young people up to 25.

### Key factors linked to escalating violence at home include:

- Unmet mental health needs or wellbeing challenges in children.
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) being unaddressed.
- Stress associated with school transitions (e.g. moving from primary to secondary) and "emotionally based school avoidance."
- Parents report serious behaviours: biting, kicking, hitting, threats, with some locking themselves in rooms for safety.
- Many parents say they are at "crisis point," frustrated by long waiting lists, high thresholds for help, and repeated rejected referrals.

### Read:

<https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media-centre/demand-for-help-with-childrens-violent-behaviour-towards-parents/>

## Forthcoming free safeguarding webinars for Autumn term 2025

**Self harm and suicidal ideation - Tuesday 7th October**

**Anti-bullying - Tuesday 14th October**

**Domestic abuse - Tuesday 21st October**

Just a reminder that all resources will be available in our **Safeguarding CPD Library**, where new recordings will be uploaded each week throughout this term.

**Dr Sandra Wiseman**

**S4S Safeguarding Lead/Specialist**

**Sandra.Wisemanservices4schools.org.uk**

**07786 582266**