



SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

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What school staff need to know about sharing information to safeguard children

Why data sharing matters in safeguarding

- Data protection law doesn't stop you sharing information when children are at risk. In fact, the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act support sharing personal data when it's necessary to protect a child.
- The ICO's 10-step guide reassures schools that "it can be more harmful not to share information that is needed to protect a child."
- Appropriate sharing is a key part of safeguarding having clear, lawful, and proportionate data sharing helps make sure children get the help they need.

Key principles for schools when sharing data

- 1. Put the child's best interests first**
 - When deciding to share data, ask: Is this in the best interests of the child?
 - Sharing for safeguarding is considered a "compelling reason."
- 2. Be clear about why you are sharing**
 - Define your objective: what risk are you addressing? What information is needed to protect the child?
 - Share only what is necessary, don't overload others with irrelevant data.
 - Document your decisions, so it's clear how and why you made them.
- 3. Have strong policies and secure systems**
 - Use data protection by design and default: build secure, well-defined sharing systems.
 - Train all relevant staff (including teachers, safeguarding leads, admin) on procedures for sharing.
 - If you share data regularly with other organisations, agree a Data Sharing Agreement (DSA). This helps define roles, responsibilities, security, and what exactly is shared.
- 4. Be transparent and respect individual rights**
 - Make sure your school's privacy notice explains how and why you share data.
 - People (parents, pupils) generally have rights under data protection law (eg access to their data), but some rights can be limited in safeguarding contexts if sharing the information could cause harm.
 - Know when exemptions apply (eg in cases of serious risk, the school may not be required to share full details or provide access).
- 5. Assess risk before sharing**
 - Conduct a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) where regular or high-risk data sharing takes place.
 - Even for one-off instances, think carefully: is sharing necessary and proportionate? What are the risks?
- 6. Use the right legal basis**
 - You must choose a lawful basis for sharing. In many safeguarding cases, consent is not required.
 - Commonly used bases in schools include public task, legal obligation, or legitimate interests, depending on the situation.
 - Document why you chose a particular basis and how it applies to your case.
- 7. Be prepared for emergencies**
 - In urgent or life-threatening situations, you may need to share information quickly. The ICO guidance supports sharing in those scenarios, provided it's necessary and proportionate.
 - Make sure staff know the procedure for emergency sharing: who to contact, what to document, and how to proceed.

Practical tips for schools

- **Designate a Data Protection Lead or DPO:** Someone who understands UK GDPR and safeguarding intersection.
- **Include data-sharing in your safeguarding policy:** Your school's safeguarding policy should explicitly cover how information is shared, who it's shared with, and in what circumstances.
- **Use ICO tools:** Use their 10-step guide ICO, lawful-basis tool, and templates to make your life easier.
- **Review regularly:** Policies, sharing agreements, and risk assessments should be revisited periodically or when your safeguarding processes change.
- **Train staff:** Not just safeguarding leads, everyone from teachers, pastoral staff, and admin needs to understand when and how to share safely.

Common questions and misconceptions

Q: Isn't GDPR a barrier to sharing?

A: No. The ICO is clear: "data protection law is not a barrier to sharing data to protect a child."

Q: Do we always need consent from parents or pupils before sharing?

A: Not always. In many safeguarding cases, consent is not needed. Other legal bases often apply.

Q: How long can we keep safeguarding data?

A: Only for as long as necessary. There are no fixed time limits, you should justify and record how long you retain data and why.

Q: What if we share data with outside agencies like social services or the police?

A: Make sure you have a clear lawful basis, and if you share regularly, set up a data sharing agreement to clarify roles, security, and restrictions.

Sharing to safeguard is not just allowed, it's essential

- **Data sharing is a vital part of safeguarding.** Done properly, it helps keep children safe.
- **Following ICO guidance** means you can share lawfully, securely, and proportionately.
- **As school staff, you play a crucial role:** your understanding and judgement can make the difference between protecting a child and missing a serious risk.
- **Use your school's policies,** talk to your DPO or safeguarding lead, and don't let GDPR stop you from doing what's needed to safeguard children.

Read:

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/data-sharing/sharing-information-to-safeguard-children-and-young-people-education-sector>

Read:

<https://www.blakemorgan.co.uk/ico-launches-new-guidance-for-education-sector-on-data-sharing-to-support-child-safeguarding/>

A4 poster:

<https://ico.org.uk/media2/migrated/4026889/tcs-a4-infographic-share-information-to-protect-a-child.pdf>

What school staff should know about the Bright Sky App

What Is Bright Sky?

Bright Sky is a **free**, safe, and easy-to-use website and mobile app developed by Hestia, in partnership with the Vodafone Foundation. It offers practical support and information about domestic abuse for people who are experiencing it or who are worried about someone else. It is available to download on iOS and Android.

Why Bright Sky is relevant for schools

1. Supporting young people

- Pupils (especially older teenagers) might have relationships at home that involve abuse, or they may be worried about parents, siblings, or other adults. Bright Sky helps them understand what domestic abuse looks like, covering emotional abuse, stalking, harassment, sexual consent, and more.
- It gives them tools to assess their own situation through a questionnaire that checks whether their relationship may be unsafe.
- It includes a secure journal feature to record incidents of abuse (via text, audio, video, or photos). Importantly, nothing is stored on the device itself, which helps protect privacy.
- This journal function can help young people build an evidence trail, which is useful if they decide to seek help from professionals.

2. Supporting staff and parents

- Not only is the app for victims; it's also designed for friends, family members, colleagues, and practitioners.
- For school staff (teachers, safeguarding leads, counsellors), Bright Sky can be a valuable resource to understand abuse, recognise signs, and find out what local help is available.
- The app includes a directory of support services across the UK, so users can locate helplines and domestic abuse organisations by postcode or current location.
- It also provides conversation prompts and guidance on how to support someone, in a way that is sensitive, practical, and safe.

3. Promoting school safety and wellbeing culture

- Having awareness of Bright Sky supports a safeguarding culture in school: staff can signpost students or parents to the app as one route to help.
- Integrating Bright Sky into school safeguarding training, policies, and pastoral care can strengthen how the school responds to domestic abuse.
- The app is endorsed by official bodies: the Home Office, and it is used by practitioners.

Why Bright Sky matters in education

- **Domestic abuse doesn't just affect adults,** children and young people can be directly or indirectly impacted by it.
- **Schools are uniquely placed to help:** staff often have a trusted relationship with students, and may be among the first to notice worrying signs.
- **By promoting Bright Sky,** schools can give pupils and families a discreet, immediate, and safe route to support and help them access specialist services.
- **Using the app is not a replacement for professional safeguarding actions,** but it's a strong tool in the toolkit.

How schools can use Bright Sky effectively

- **Introduce it to pupils:** During PSHE/RSHE lessons, safeguarding briefings, or form-time discussions. Make sure pupils know this is a resource they can access discreetly.
- **Staff training:** Safeguarding leads and pastoral staff should be familiar with the app so they can recommend it confidently.
- **Parent and carer communication:** Share information about Bright Sky in newsletters, on the school website, or during parent workshops so they know where to turn for support.
- **Partnerships:** Link with local domestic abuse charities. Use Bright Sky as part of a wider referral network.
- **Safe usage planning:** Recognise that if a pupil or parent wants to download the app, they may need to think about their privacy, eg whether their phone is monitored, whether they have a safe email for the journal, etc.

Read:

<https://www.hestia.org/brightsky>

Forthcoming free safeguarding webinars for Autumn term 2 2025

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) - Tuesday 2nd December

County lines - Tuesday 9th December

Trauma - Tuesday 16th December

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