



SAFEGUARDING UPDATE - WHAT DO PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

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TUESDAY 22ND SEPTEMBER 2026 • ISSUE 4

What parents need to know: When can information about your child be shared?

Schools hold lots of information about children and families. Most of the time, this information is treated confidentially and only shared when there is a clear reason to do so.

But what happens when a school is worried about a child's safety or wellbeing? Does the school need a parent's permission before speaking to another professional?

New statutory guidance from the Department for Education provides greater clarity about when information should be shared to help safeguard children and promote their welfare.

From 30th September 2026, a new Information Sharing Duty comes into force in England.

Why is sharing information so important?

One professional may only see one small part of what is happening in a child's life. A teacher may notice a change in behaviour. A GP may know about difficulties at home. Another service may be supporting the family. Individually, these pieces of information may not appear particularly significant.

When appropriate information is brought together, however, professionals can develop a much clearer picture of what a child may be experiencing.

Sharing information can help professionals to identify needs earlier, provide support and prevent concerns from escalating.

Does there have to be a serious safeguarding concern before information can be shared?

No.

One of the important messages within the new guidance is that professionals do not have to wait until a child is at risk of significant harm before relevant information can be shared.

Information sharing can also be appropriate where there are:

- emerging concerns
- unmet needs
- early help or support needs
- concerns about a child's wellbeing
- concerns that may become more serious without support

The aim is not simply to respond when something has already gone wrong. Earlier information sharing can help children and families receive support before difficulties escalate.

Does a school always need my consent?

No.

There are circumstances where relevant safeguarding information can be shared without parental consent.

Where the new Information Sharing Duty applies, professionals must share relevant information if they consider that doing so may help another relevant organisation to assess need or risk, make a decision, provide support or take action to safeguard or promote a child's welfare.

This does not mean that parents should automatically be left out of the conversation. Where it is appropriate and safe, professionals should be open and transparent with children and families about what information is being shared and why.

What if I don't want information shared?

Parents may understandably have questions or concerns about personal information being shared.

However, the guidance makes clear that a lack of consent, or concern that a parent may be unhappy about information being shared, should not by itself prevent appropriate safeguarding information sharing.

There are very limited circumstances where information may not be shared, for example where sharing particular information could place a child at greater risk of harm. The child's safety and welfare remain central to the decision.

What about data protection?

Data protection legislation is there to protect people's personal information, but it should not prevent appropriate safeguarding action.

Schools and other organisations must still ensure that information is handled lawfully, securely and proportionately.

The important message is that data protection should not be used as a reason for withholding information when sharing it is necessary to safeguard or promote a child's welfare.

Will everything about my family be shared?

No.

Information sharing should be relevant and proportionate. Professionals should consider what information is actually needed and how sharing it could help another service understand or support the child.

This may sometimes include relevant information about other people in a child's life if that information has a bearing on the child's safety or welfare.

Why might information about my family be important?

Children's lives do not exist in isolation.

Changes or difficulties within a family can sometimes affect a child's wellbeing, even when nobody intends this to happen.

For example, professionals may need to consider information about circumstances at home if it helps them understand why a child is struggling or what additional support could help the family.

This does not mean that families are being judged. The purpose of sharing relevant information is to help professionals understand the whole picture and make informed decisions about support.

What should I do if I'm worried about information being shared?

If you have questions, speak to your child's school.

You can ask:

- What information is being shared?
- Why does it need to be shared?
- Who will it be shared with?
- How will sharing this information help my child?
- How will my child's information be kept secure?

Where it is safe and appropriate, good safeguarding practice should involve working openly with children and families.

The key message for parents

Information sharing is not about professionals unnecessarily passing personal information between organisations.

It is about making sure that important pieces of a child's story are not considered in isolation. Sometimes information that appears small on its own becomes much more important when combined with information held by another professional.

The aim is simple: to identify concerns earlier, provide the right support and help keep children safe.

Free resources for parents and carers

Department for Education: Information Sharing to Safeguard Children and Young People

The Department for Education provides free statutory guidance explaining how information can be shared between organisations and professionals to help safeguard children and promote their welfare.

Although primarily written for professionals and organisations, it is a useful resource for parents and carers who want to understand why a school or another service may need to share information about their child or family.

The guidance can help parents understand:

- why sharing information can be important in keeping children safe
- when safeguarding information may need to be shared
- why professionals do not always need parental consent before sharing information
- how information sharing can help identify needs and provide support earlier
- how data protection and safeguarding work together
- why professionals should be open and transparent with families where it is safe and appropriate to do so
- how decisions about sharing information should focus on the child's safety and welfare

Link to free guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/information-sharing-to-safeguard-children-and-young-people>

NSPCC - Information Sharing and Safeguarding.

The NSPCC provides free safeguarding information explaining why professionals sometimes need to share information about a child or family.

The resources explain how information held by different people and organisations can help build a clearer picture of a child's life and ensure children and families receive the right support at the right time.

The resources include information about:

- why information sharing is important
- when safeguarding information should be shared
- confidentiality and consent
- how information sharing can help professionals identify risks
- why data protection law does not prevent appropriate safeguarding information sharing
- the importance of sharing information at the right time
- how multi-agency working helps keep children safe

Link to free resources:

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/recognising-and-responding-to-abuse>

NSPCC - Multi-agency Working and Information Sharing.

NSPCC Learning also provides free information about how professionals work together and share information when there are concerns about a child.

This can be particularly useful for parents who want to understand why a school may sometimes speak to other services when concerns arise.

The guidance explains the importance of:

- professionals sharing relevant safeguarding information
- building a fuller picture of a child's circumstances
- sharing concerns promptly rather than waiting for difficulties to escalate
- professionals communicating with one another when circumstances change
- keeping the child's welfare at the centre of decision-making

Link to free resources:

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/practice-points-series/multi-agency-working-information-sharing>