



SAFEGUARDING UPDATE - WHAT DO PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

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Children referred to Prevent – what parents need to know

A new report from the Children's Commissioner for England has highlighted concerns about children and young people who develop a strong fascination with extreme violence, harmful online content or mass-casualty attacks.

Importantly, these children may not necessarily hold a particular extremist ideology. This means that while their behaviour may be extremely concerning, they may not always meet the criteria for support through the Prevent programme.

What is Prevent?

Prevent is part of the UK's approach to protecting people who may be vulnerable to radicalisation or becoming involved in terrorism.

Schools and other professionals can make a Prevent referral when they are worried about a child. A referral does not mean that a child has committed an offence or that they will automatically receive an intervention; it allows concerns to be considered and assessed.

What behaviours might cause concern?

The Children's Commissioner describes children who may be becoming increasingly preoccupied with violence or disturbing online material. Warning signs could include:

- frequently talking about weapons or extreme violence;
- idolising or becoming fascinated with well-known attackers;
- watching or sharing videos depicting serious violence, suicide or other disturbing content;
- sharing extreme pornography;
- encouraging others to join dangerous online communities; or
- encouraging others to harm themselves.

One behaviour on its own does not necessarily mean that a child is being radicalised. Changes, patterns and escalation over time are important.

Why is the online world important?

The report raises particular concerns about children becoming obsessed with violence within online environments. Parents may not always know what their child is seeing online, particularly when children use private messaging, gaming platforms, social media or online communities. Rather than relying solely on restrictions, having regular, open conversations about what children are seeing and doing online can help parents identify concerns earlier.

What can parents do?

If you notice a significant change in your child's interests, language or behaviour, try to remain calm and curious. Ask what they are watching, who they are talking to and why particular content interests them. Avoid immediately judging or confronting them, as this may make them less willing to talk.

Parents should also take seriously any repeated fascination with extreme violence, threats to harm themselves or others, or involvement in dangerous online communities. If you are worried, speak to your child's school or Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). They can discuss the concerns with you and consider whether further safeguarding advice or support is required.

The key message for parents

Be interested in your child's online world and don't dismiss significant changes in behaviour or an increasing fascination with violence as simply a phase. Most children who encounter upsetting or controversial material online will not become radicalised or present a risk to others. However, where behaviour becomes persistent, increasingly extreme or worrying, early conversations and appropriate support matter. You do not need to decide whether something meets the threshold for Prevent yourself. If something doesn't feel right, share your concerns and seek advice.

Read:

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/children-referred-to-the-prevent-programme/>

Press release:

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/press-notice/press-notice-childrens-commissioner-demands-reform-of-anti-extremism-programme/>

Mentalising and emotion regulation – what parents need to know

Children can experience big emotions that they do not yet have the words or skills to manage. Anxiety can look like anger, worry can lead to avoidance, and feeling overwhelmed can sometimes appear as challenging or defiant behaviour.

Recent research discussed by ACAMH explores mentalising and emotion regulation and highlights the important role parents and carers can play in helping children understand and manage their feelings.

What is 'mentalising'?

Mentalising simply means trying to understand the thoughts, feelings, fears and intentions that might be behind someone's behaviour.

When your child behaves in a way that is difficult to understand, rather than

immediately thinking: "They're doing this deliberately." **It can help to wonder:** "What might be happening for my child right now?"

They may be frightened, embarrassed, worried, confused or simply overwhelmed. This does not mean accepting unacceptable behaviour; it means trying to understand what may be driving it before deciding how best to respond.

Why can children struggle with their emotions?

Emotion regulation is the ability to recognise, manage and respond to our feelings. Children are still developing these skills and continue to rely on adults to help them name emotions, make sense of situations, cope with distress and calm down.

A child who is struggling may:

- become angry or upset very quickly;
- find it difficult to explain how they feel;
- withdraw or avoid situations;
- bottle things up before eventually exploding; or

- repeatedly focus on worries or upsetting thoughts.

What can parents do?

When emotions are running high, children and adults can find it harder to think clearly about what another person might be feeling or intending. A calm response can therefore help prevent situations from escalating. **Try to:**

- **Stay curious** – ask what might be behind the behaviour.
- **Help name emotions** – "You seem really frustrated. Is that how you're feeling?"
- **Avoid assumptions** – you may not immediately know why your child has reacted in a particular way.
- **Wait** until things are calmer before trying to have an important conversation.
- **Listen** without immediately trying to fix everything.
- **Look for patterns** – consider when behaviours happen and what may trigger them.
- **Seek support** if your child's emotional or behavioural difficulties are persistent, worsening or affecting everyday life.

Read:

<https://www.acamh.org/blog/mentalising-and-emotion-regulation-in-children-and-families/>

KCSIE 2026 – what parents need to know

From 1st September 2026, schools and colleges in England must follow the updated Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026 statutory guidance. KCSIE sets out the legal duties schools and colleges must follow to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under 18. While the guidance is primarily written for education professionals, there are several important messages for parents and carers too.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility

Schools are expected to create a culture where children feel safe, listened to and able to raise concerns. Staff must remain alert to signs that a child may need help or protection, including changes in behaviour, attendance, emotional wellbeing, relationships or online activity. If something is worrying you about your child, you do not need to wait until you are certain something is wrong. Speak to the school and, in particular, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

Online safety continues to be a priority

Children's lives increasingly move between the online and offline worlds, and safeguarding needs to reflect this. Schools should help children understand online risks and have appropriate systems for filtering and monitoring school technology. **Parents can help by having regular conversations about:**

- what their child is doing online;
- who they are communicating with;
- harmful or inappropriate content;
- sharing images;
- online relationships and coercion; and
- the growing risks associated with AI-generated or manipulated content.

Child-on-child abuse must never be dismissed

KCSIE reinforces that children can harm other children. This can include bullying, sexual harassment and violence, abuse within intimate relationships and harmful behaviour online. Schools should not dismiss concerning behaviour as "banter", "just having a laugh" or "part of growing up".

Parents should speak to the school if their child tells them something has happened, appears frightened of another child or group, or shows unexplained changes in behaviour.

Attendance can also be a safeguarding issue

Regular attendance is an important protective factor for children. Persistent or unexplained absence can sometimes indicate that a child is experiencing difficulties or may be at risk of harm, including exploitation or radicalisation. Schools should therefore consider what may be happening for a child, rather than viewing absence simply as an attendance issue. Parents should talk to school early if there are difficulties affecting their child's attendance so that appropriate support can be considered.

Getting help early matters

KCSIE 2026 reflects the wider move towards Family Help and earlier support for children and families. Parents should not be afraid to ask for help. Safeguarding is not only about responding when a child is at immediate risk, it is also about identifying difficulties early and getting the right support in place before problems escalate. Schools work alongside children's social care, health services, the police and other agencies as part of the wider safeguarding system.

Information may need to be shared

Parents can sometimes worry about schools sharing information about their family. Where there is a safeguarding concern, however, professionals may need to share relevant information with other agencies to protect a child. KCSIE is clear that data protection should not prevent appropriate information sharing when safeguarding children. Where appropriate and safe to do so, schools will normally seek to work openly and collaboratively with parents.

What can parents do?

- **Know who your school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) is.**
- **Talk regularly with your child and listen when they tell you something is worrying them.**
- **Take changes in behaviour, friendships, attendance or online activity seriously.**
- **Be interested in your child's online life.**
- **Share relevant information with school, even if you are unsure whether it is important.**
- **Ask questions if you do not understand a safeguarding decision.**
- **Seek help early rather than waiting for a situation to become more serious.**

The key message for parents

Safeguarding works best when schools, parents and children work together. You know your child well. Schools see them in a different environment and may notice changes or patterns that are not apparent at home.

Sharing information, keeping communication open and responding early to concerns can help ensure children receive the right help, at the right time.

Read the guidance:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a4cf903b7203c4c023fd2f3/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2026_.pdf