

Safeguarding Scenario 20 - Please don't tell anyone

🚨 "Please don't tell anyone. It will makes things worse."

At morning drop-off, the mother of a Year 5 pupil asks if she can speak privately to her child's teacher.

She becomes upset and says: **"Things aren't good at home. My partner gets angry and controls everything I do. Last night he smashed my phone and wouldn't let me leave the house. My daughter was upstairs. I don't think she saw anything, but she probably heard us."**

She explains that her partner regularly checks her phone, controls the family's money and becomes threatening if she challenges him.

She then says: **"Please don't tell anyone. I shouldn't have said anything. He'll be furious if he finds out I've spoken to you."**

The teacher knows the pupil has recently become quieter in class, has been arriving late and has twice complained of feeling tired.

Would your team know what to do?



The Scenario

Domestic abuse can include physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse and psychological, emotional or other abuse.

Importantly, children do not have to be physically assaulted or directly witness an incident to be affected. A child who sees, hears or experiences the effects of domestic abuse and is related to the victim or perpetrator is recognised as a victim of domestic abuse in their own right.

So this is not simply:

- “A problem between the adults.”
- “Something happening outside school.”
- “Mum's private information.”
- “Something we only need to act on if the child witnessed it.”

The safeguarding question is:

“What is this child experiencing, and what might the disclosure tell us about their safety and welfare?”



✗ DON'T PROMISE CONFIDENTIALITY

The member of staff should not agree to keep the disclosure secret. Respond calmly and sensitively. You might explain:

“Thank you for telling me. I can't promise to keep this just between us because I need to think about your child's safety, but I will only share the information with people who need to know so that we can consider the right support.”

Do not criticise the parent, question why they have remained in the relationship or tell them simply to leave.

Leaving an abusive relationship can itself be a period of significant risk.



LISTEN – DON'T INVESTIGATE

Allow the parent to explain what they want to tell you. Avoid conducting your own investigation or asking unnecessary or leading questions.

You may need enough information to understand whether there is an immediate safeguarding risk, for example:

- Is the child safe now?
- Where is the child?
- Is anyone in immediate danger?
- Are there other children in the household?
- Is there anything you need to know immediately to help keep the child safe?

If anyone is in **immediate danger**, follow emergency procedures and contact the police on **999**.

THINK CHILD – NOT JUST ADULT

Even if the parent says: “**My child wasn't involved**” remain professionally curious.

Consider:

- Has the child seen or heard the abuse?
- Have they experienced its effects?
- Is the child frightened of the alleged perpetrator?
- Has the abuse affected sleep, attendance or punctuality?
- Has the child's behaviour or emotional wellbeing changed?
- Is the child taking on caring responsibilities?
- Are there siblings or other children in the household?
- Is there coercive control, stalking, threats or escalating behaviour?
- What else is already known about the child and family?

Children may experience domestic abuse without ever directly telling an adult what is happening.

Changes in behaviour, attendance, presentation, emotional wellbeing or relationships may contribute to the wider safeguarding picture.

SHARE THE CONCERN WITHOUT DELAY

KCSIE 2026 is clear that staff should act immediately where they have a safeguarding concern.

The member of staff should share the disclosure with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or deputy without delay, following the school's child protection procedures.

Do not wait to see whether another incident occurs.

Do not decide that because the parent is an adult, it is solely their responsibility to seek help.

The DSL should consider the information alongside **everything already known about the child and family** and determine the appropriate safeguarding response.

Depending on the circumstances, this may include:

- community-based early help or other family support
- specialist domestic abuse support
- consultation or referral to children's social care
- liaison with other agencies
- police involvement where appropriate
- immediate safeguarding action where a child is at risk of harm.

The response should be child-centred and proportionate to the level of need and risk.

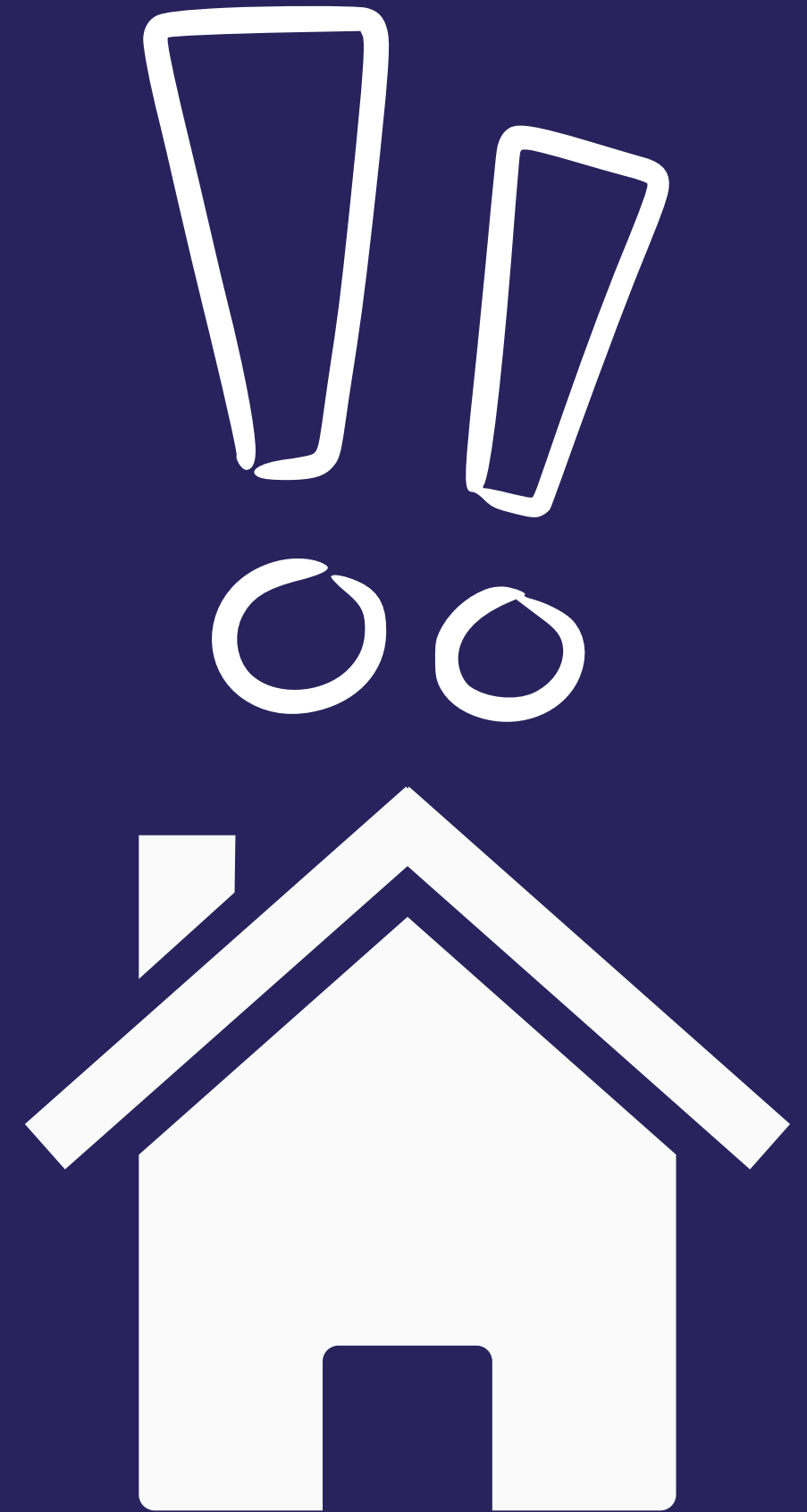
BE CAREFUL ABOUT CONTACTING HOME

Routine procedures may need to be reconsidered where domestic abuse is disclosed. For example, do not automatically telephone, email or message the alleged perpetrator about the disclosure.

Consider:

- Who is safe to contact?
- Could a telephone call or message place the parent or child at greater risk?
- Does the alleged perpetrator monitor the parent's phone or emails?
- Are there safe contact arrangements already in place?
- What information should and should not be shared?

The DSL should help determine how communication is managed safely.



RECORD ACCURATELY

The member of staff should make an accurate safeguarding record as soon as possible. Include:

- what the parent said, using their own words where possible
- relevant observations
- information relating to the child
- who the concern was shared with
- actions taken
- decisions made and the rationale for those decisions
- outcomes where known

Do not include assumptions, personal opinions or a diagnosis of what is happening.

KCSIE 2026 expects safeguarding records to clearly capture the concern, actions, decisions, rationale and outcomes.



LOOK AT THE WHOLE PICTURE

The DSL notices that the child's safeguarding chronology also contains:

- Three late arrivals this month
- Two occasions when she appeared extremely tired
- A recent comment that "Dad gets really angry"
- Increasing withdrawal from friends

None of these pieces of information necessarily establishes harm on its own.

Together with the parent's disclosure, however, they may present a very different picture.

This is why effective safeguarding requires staff to record concerns, share information and identify patterns rather than viewing incidents in isolation.



The Safeguarding Question

Later, the teacher thinks:

“Mum specifically asked me not to tell anyone. Have I betrayed her trust by sharing it?”



No.

Where information indicates a safeguarding concern about a child, staff cannot promise confidentiality.

The information should be shared **appropriately and on a need-to-know basis** so that the child's safety and welfare can be considered.

KCSIE 2026 reinforces that **data protection is not a barrier to safeguarding** and that staff should act immediately and share concerns with the DSL or deputy.

Sometimes the most important question isn't: **"Did the child actually see the domestic abuse?"**

It is: **"How is this child experiencing what is happening at home, and what do we need to do to help keep them safe?"**

Listen. Don't judge. Think child. Record. Share. Assess the risk. Act.

