

Safeguarding Disabled Children: A Resource for Local Safeguarding Children's Boards

'One of the biggest barriers faced by disabled children is that they are commonly seen as their impairment. Their age, gender, ethnicity, religion and culture that make up their unique individuality are subsumed to this one dimensional labeling.'
Chpt 4 Nat. Working Group on Child Protection & Disability.

This guidance is divided into seven detailed and fully referenced sections.

1. Vulnerability of disabled children to abuse.

This section of the resource summarises what is known about disabled children's vulnerability to abuse. Research clearly indicates that disabled children are more vulnerable to abuse. There are a wide number of reasons for this including, being in receipt of intimate care from various carers; more likely to be in receipt of respite care away from home; abusive care practices often go unrecognised and there is a common failure to consult with and listen to disabled children.

2. Safeguarding

The local Safeguarding Children Board has to ensure a system is in place to ensure that all disabled children are safeguarded from emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect. A number of mechanisms are recommended for this purpose, for example sub groups; conferences/seminars, consultative work and safeguarding and disabled children should be placed as a regular item on the LSCB agenda.

3. Guidelines for Professionals

This section is for individual professionals who are involved at various stages of the safeguarding process. It recognises that disabled children have the same right to be protected from harm as non-disabled children but they also have additional needs and some different experiences. These have implications for all stages of the safeguarding process.

All practitioners need to understand the criteria for deciding which service or agency will provide Safeguarding services to a disabled child. Specific detail is needed to clarify how the disability affects the child and his/her parents/carers and ways in which the child communicates. Certain types of harm experienced by disabled children are not always recognised, e.g., failure to meet the communication needs of a hearing impaired child, inappropriate behaviour modification & misuse of medication. It recommends that you need to seek specialist advice in order to make judgements about whether a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. In order to interview a disabled child in line with Achieving Best Evidence in Interviews (2002) a practitioner may need for example, to take more time, to use an interpreter/communication facilitator, use a suitable venue and access specialist guidance or consultancy.

4. Communication with Disabled Children

' If a child has complex needs or communication difficulties arrangements must be made to establish his views...even children with severe learning disabilities or very limited expressive language can communicate preferences if they are asked in the right way by people who understand their needs and have the relevant skills to listen to them'. Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regs. Vol 6.

Disabled children experience the same barriers to communication as non-disabled children: for example, the failure of adults to listen to them properly; a fear of not being believed or of the consequence if they are.

LSCBs can take strategic action in order to ensure that staff safeguarding disabled children are trained in the appropriate communication skills; are adequately resourced and have access to specialist advice and information on communication.

5. Training Issues

Good safeguarding training for disabled children's teams and service providers, and good disability equality and deaf awareness training for children and families teams will be the key to effective safeguarding for disabled children- whatever the organisational structure and responsibilities. All those who come into contact with disabled children should have access to safeguarding training.

When LSCBs organise workshops or seminars on specific issues, such as attachment theory, resilience, or emotional abuse, it will be important to ensure that these address disabled children's needs and experiences.

6. Background

This section of the resource provides some background information about disabled children and is intended to help those with a strategic or planning responsibility to understand the context of safeguarding activity for disabled children.

The term 'disabled child' is defined as a child who has impairment and who experiences disabling barriers. The child may also experience ill health related to impairment and/or disabling barriers, and will usually have special educational needs. Almost all will come under the Disability Discrimination Act definition of 'disabled person'.

7. Legislation

This section provides information about legislation and guidance that forms the framework for safeguarding and meeting the needs of disabled children.