Factsheet: new statutory guidance on information sharing

What is the guidance and where does it come from?

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 introduced a new statutory duty to share information for the purposes of safeguarding children and promoting their welfare. On 10 September 2026, statutory guidance was published to help agencies implement this duty, which comes into force on 30 September 2026.

What does the information sharing duty mean in practice?

Where an agency, through its practitioners, considers that it holds information relevant to safeguarding or promoting a child's welfare, that information must be shared where it may help another relevant organisation exercise its safeguarding functions. This means that:

- **There is no requirement to meet a statutory threshold before information can be shared**, the duty to share information is not limited to child protection concerns or significant harm. The duty supports prevention as well as protection: information should be shared to identify needs early and prevent escalation, not only where there are child protection concerns.
- **You do not need to be certain about the level of need, risk or intervention required if you think the information *may help*** another agency assess risk, assess need, make decisions, provide support or take action to prevent harm or escalation of needs. Feeling unsure or uncomfortable about sharing information must not prevent action.
- **Consent is not required to share information**, practitioners should not delay or prevent information sharing because consent has not been obtained.
- **Parental responses should not prevent sharing information**, information must be shared even if there is a concern that a parent will be unhappy or might complain about the decision.
- **Data protection principles must be complied with when sharing information, but should not be used as a reason not to share**, the child's safety and welfare is the primary concern and data protection should not be used as a reason to prevent information sharing.
- **The only exception is where sharing would be more detrimental to the child than not sharing**, this exception is expected to be rare and usually relates to situations where sharing would place a child at immediate risk of harm, undermine a criminal investigation, or breach court restrictions.
- **The duty is both proactive and reactive**, information must be shared proactively if considered relevant to safeguarding and promoting a child's welfare, but also reactively when another agency asks for the information.
- **Best practice is to inform the child and/or their parent/carer if you are sharing information**, unless doing so would increase risk or is impracticable.

What information needs to be shared?

Information which is considered relevant to safeguarding and promoting a child's welfare must be shared if it may help another agency exercise their functions, including assessing risk, decision-making, providing support or taking action to safeguard or promote the welfare of the child. Only information relevant to safeguarding and promoting welfare should be shared, and sharing should be proportionate to the safeguarding purpose. This includes, but is not limited to:

- **Contextual information**, about the child's wider circumstances. For example, a caregiver's substance misuse is believed to be inhibiting their ability to provide safe and effective care.
- **Partial information**, even information which appears incomplete should be shared if considered relevant. For example, changes in behaviour, attendance, health or presentation that may indicate emerging or escalating vulnerability, harm or unmet welfare needs.
- **Pattern-based information**, information that may appear low-level or insignificant in isolation but becomes relevant when viewed over time or alongside other information. For example, patterns of coming to police attention, repeated low-level concerns, multiple school absences, recurring health presentations, or repeated contacts with services.
- **Historical information**, information about relevant past events, incidents or concerns may need to be shared if they help another agency understand a child's circumstances, assess risk or identify need.
- **Information which indicates a child may pose a risk to others**, information sharing may be necessary where concerns relate to a child who may pose a risk to other children or adults.
- **Information about people connected to children**, information about any individual – a peer or an adult – which is relevant must be shared. For example, factors that may inhibit parental ability, or concerns regarding peers influencing a child's safety or wellbeing.

Who does the duty apply to?

The duty applies specifically to the following agencies:

- Local authorities
- Integrated care boards
- NHS Trusts
- The police
- Education
- Early years
- Prison and probation services
- Youth justice services
- Youth custody services
- GPs, dentists and other primary care providers
- Any other agency who delivers services by arrangement with someone above

Who do they need to share information with?

Information must be shared with any agency to which the duty applies where sharing may help that agency assess need, assess risk, make decisions, provide support or take action to safeguard a child or promote their welfare. The duty is not about Children's Social Care referrals alone. Agencies should proactively share information and seek information from one another where this may help understand a child's circumstances, assess need or risk, determine the right support, or take action to safeguard and promote welfare. For example:

- A school can seek information from a GP where it may help understand concerns about a child's welfare, like whether there is a medical reason to explain something
- A health professional can seek information from a school to better understand a child's presentation, attendance or wellbeing
- A GP can ask for information from adult mental health services if it will help to understand whether an observation should be a cause for concern
- The police can share information with education or health services where it may assist assessment, planning or support.

How should decisions be recorded?

Practitioners should record the decision for sharing, or not sharing, including any rationale pertaining to relevance, the facilitation of another organisation's relevant functions, detriment and anything else they determine necessary to comply with their internal governance, data protection or any other statutory obligations. Recording supports accountability and demonstrates compliance with statutory obligations.

What should I do if we hold relevant information?

- Act promptly and be proactive; avoid unnecessary delay.
- Be able to demonstrate accountability for compliance with the information sharing duty, and with data protection law. Record the decision for sharing, or not sharing, including any rationale pertaining to relevance, the facilitation of another organisation's relevant functions, detriment and anything else they determine necessary to comply with their internal governance, data protection or any other statutory obligations.
- When requesting information, include the necessary and proportionate contextual information for the recipient to determine what should be shared, and why it may facilitate the requestor's relevant functions
- Inform the child and/or parents/ unless doing so would increase risk or is impracticable. guardians about what information has been shared where appropriate.
- Keep the child's wishes/feelings, if known, under active consideration but recognise that their safety and welfare is paramount.
- Use agreed local pathways to share information, as outlined in their local multiagency safeguarding arrangements – see Chapter 4.

- Provide acknowledgement and timely feedback to organisations and practitioners from whom they have received information, to inform them of receipt and any decisions taken as a result. Effective multi-agency information sharing should be understood as a dialogue between relevant organisations, and communication of outcomes is important to understand what action has been taken.
- Where safe and practicable, make parents aware of concerns about other individuals in a child's life where it is relevant to the child's safety and welfare. Where organisations do not have powers to do so, they should inform the appropriate organisation that can.

What do I need to do next?

- **Frontline practitioners**, should familiarise themselves with the guidance and seek out training and advice if they are unsure what is expected of them.
- **Managers should**, ensure teams are aware of the changes and support their staff and volunteers to comply with the new duty.
- **Leaders should**,
  - consider what changes need to be made to policy, procedure, guidance, commissioning agreements, data sharing agreements and digital infrastructure
  - consider how these changes will be communicated to children and families[1]
  - review organisational cultures and practices that may unintentionally discourage information sharing, ensuring that staff feel confident to share relevant information where the duty applies.

Read the full guidance:
Information sharing: advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services

Next Steps:

- The government has indicated it will produce materials for distribution among children and families to cover both consent and confidentiality – these are intended to explain an organisation's obligation under the information sharing duty in an engaging and accessible manner.

- The government will be delievring separate guidance on how the information sharing duty aligns with the madatory reporting duty