

# WESTMINSTER ABBEY CHOIR SCHOOL

## POLICY DOCUMENT

### SAFEGUARDING

**This policy is published on the Abbey's website and a copy is given to all parents annually in the Parents' Handbook**

The school will safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with the Department for Education (DfE) Guidance "Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education". There are five main elements to our policy, which applies to all staff, Governors and volunteers working in the school:

- Ensuring that we practise safe recruitment in checking the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children.
- Raising awareness of child protection issues and equipping children with the skills needed to keep them safe.
- Developing and implementing procedures for identifying and reporting cases or suspected cases of abuse.
- Supporting pupils who have been abused in accordance with their agreed child protection plan.
- Establishing a safe environment in which children can learn and develop.

We recognise that, because of their day-to-day contact with children, staff are well placed to observe the outward signs of abuse. The school will therefore

- establish and maintain an environment where children feel secure, are encouraged to talk and are listened to
- ensure that children know that there are adults in the school whom they can approach if they are worried
- include opportunities in the PSHCE curriculum for children to develop the skills they need to recognise and stay safe from abuse.

We will follow the procedures set out by the Local Safeguarding Children Board and take account of guidance issued by DfE to

- ensure that we have a designated senior person for child protection who has received appropriate training and support for this role
- ensure that we have a nominated Governor responsible for child protection who has also received appropriate training
- ensure that every member of staff (including temporary and supply staff and volunteers) and of the Governing Body knows the name of the designated senior person responsible for child protection and his role
- ensure that all staff and volunteers understand their responsibilities in being alert to the signs of abuse and for referring any concerns to the designated senior

- person responsible for child protection
- ensure that parents have an understanding of the responsibility placed on the school and staff for child protection by setting out the relevant obligations in the parents' handbook
- notify Social Services if there is an unexplained absence of more than two days of a pupil who has a child protection plan
- develop effective links with relevant agencies and cooperate as required with their enquiries regarding child protection matters including attendance at case conferences
- keep written records of concerns about children, even where there is no need to refer the matter immediately
- ensure that all records are kept securely, separate from the main pupil file
- develop and follow procedures where an allegation is made against a member of staff or volunteer
- ensure that safe recruitment practices are always followed.

We recognise that children who are abused or witness violence may find it difficult to develop a sense of self-worth. They may feel helplessness, humiliation and some sense of blame. The school may be the only stable, secure and predictable element in the lives of children at risk. When at school their behaviour may be challenging and defiant or they may be withdrawn. The school will endeavour to support the pupil through

- the content of the curriculum
- the school ethos which promotes a positive, supportive and secure environment and gives pupils a sense of being valued
- the school behaviour policy which is aimed at supporting vulnerable pupils in the school. The school will ensure that the pupil knows that some behaviour is unacceptable but that he is valued and not to be blamed for any abuse that has occurred
- liaison with other agencies that support the pupil such as Social Services, Child and Adult Mental Health Service, education welfare service and educational psychology service
- ensuring that, where a pupil with a child protection plan leaves, their information is transferred to the new school immediately and that the child's social worker is informed.

Procedures and arrangements to implement these policy objectives are set out in the Annex.

# ANNEX

## SAFEGUARDING

We all have a statutory duty to ‘safeguard and promote the welfare’ of children. Pupils and staff have the right to protection from abuse and exploitation. Staff should work towards fulfilling the school’s vision of providing a nurturing environment where each child is inspired to learn and discover his potential and to feel safe and secure amongst his peers and staff. It is essential that we maintain effective methods and systems to monitor and review the safety and welfare of pupils and staff.

### **Recruitment of Staff**

The school will operate safe recruitment procedures including reference to the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA), CRB checks and compliance with Independent School Standards Regulations in order to ensure as far as is possible that staff are suitably qualified to care for children. (See also RECRUITMENT POLICY). Any person whose services are no longer used because he or she is considered unsuitable to work with children will be reported to the ISA within one month of leaving the school. The school will seek assurance that appropriate child protection checks and procedures apply to staff employed by another organisation with whom its pupils are working.

### **Child Protection Core Group**

<i>Designated Senior Person (DSP):</i>	<i>The Headmaster (Jonathan Milton)</i>
<i>Nominated Governor (NG):</i>	<i>Mr. Edward Smith</i>
<i>Chairman of Governors (CoG)</i>	<i>The Dean</i>

The school will operate its policy in accordance with Westminster City Council’s inter-agency procedures. See London Child Protection Procedures v 3 (2007 edition).

Concerns, however mild, should be taken to the DSP who will advise on further action. In the absence of the DSP, concerns should be referred to the Senior Master (Simon Detre).

In the event of an allegation made by a child against a member of staff, the DSP will speak to the child/children involved, without in any way investigating the allegation; he will make notes and, if the allegation is not withdrawn, report it immediately to the Chairman of Governors. If the allegation is against a member of the resident staff, the school will provide accommodation away from the pupils while the matter is being dealt with by the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB). If an allegation is made to a member of staff concerning inappropriate behaviour by the Headmaster, that member of staff must report it immediately to the Chairman of Governors without notifying the Headmaster first.

### **Training**

Regular child protection training sessions will be given to the whole staff, a minimum of every three years. The DSP and the Senior Master will undertake relevant training in child protection and inter-agency working at least every two years. New staff will be given guidance on their responsibilities and a comprehensive talk as to how the school system operates. Guidance will be given to all staff to ensure as far as is possible that their behaviour and actions do not place pupils or themselves at risk of harm or of allegations of harm to a pupil, for example in one-to-one dealings with children.

Boys will be advised what to do if they are worried about something or if they suspect that they or another boy is in any sort of danger. Opportunities will be made in Form Circle Time to discuss any concerns boys may have. Senior boys are given special briefing by the headmaster as to their important role in child protection within the school.

### Missing Pupils

In the event of a pupil going missing, the school will operate its Missing Pupils Policy which outlines exactly what would happen and who would be contacted at each stage of the process.

### Reporting

It is the specific responsibility of every member of staff to report to the DSP, or to OFSTED, any concern or allegation about school practices or the behaviour of colleagues or pupils which are likely to put pupils at risk of abuse or other serious harm. Staff should rest assured that there would be neither retribution nor disciplinary action for such "whistleblowing" in good faith.

The member of staff reporting a concern will be asked to give a written account of the alleged incident. This will be kept as a record for possible future reference. It is understood that should a member of staff simply wish to share a worry, or need simple advice on how best to deal with an incident, it is important to report such concerns however mild they may seem.

In the event of an allegation of abuse between pupils the DSP will seek advice from the LADO before responding formally.

### Recognising Child Abuse

It is part of a teacher's responsibility to learn to recognise signs of abuse and to refer any such concerns to the DSP. Staff will be given training to help them to fulfil this role. Appended to this Policy is a document entitled: When to worry about a Child. Any signs or symptoms of child abuse should be treated with caution. At times there will be straightforward explanations for injuries or behaviour. What is essential is that teachers share their concerns with the DSP.

### Definitions of Child Abuse

Concerns may be identified under the following headings:

**Neglect** is the persistent failure to meet a child's physical and psychological needs, which is likely to result in serious impairment of a child's health or development, including failure to thrive or failure to protect a child from danger. There is often little professional consensus as to what exactly constitutes neglect.

**Physical abuse** is a physical injury to a child where there is definite knowledge or a reasonable suspicion that the injury was inflicted or knowingly not prevented. This includes, for example, deliberate poisoning, attempted drowning or smothering and Munchausen's syndrome by proxy - where a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes, ill health in a child. Physical abuse can lead directly to neurological damage, physical injuries, disability or even death.

**Emotional abuse** is the persistent or emotional ill treatment of a child which has a severe adverse effect on the behaviour and emotional development of that child. Its diagnosis will require medical, psychological, psychiatric, social and educational assessment. (NB: All abuse involves some emotional ill treatment; this category should only be used when it is the main or sole form of abuse). There is increasing evidence of the long-term consequences for children's development of emotional abuse. It can have a negative impact on a child's behaviour and self-esteem.

**Sexual Abuse** is the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities that they do not truly comprehend and to which they are unable to give informed consent. This may include non-contact activities such as involving children in watching pornographic videos or watching sexual activities. The key elements in any definition of child sexual abuse are: betrayal of trust and responsibility, abuse of power for the sexual gratification of the abuser, inability of children to give consent.

### **Responding to Disclosure:**

- Ensure the child is safe and, if in distress, cared for.
- Reassure the child that you are listening and want to help.
- Let the child talk freely; do not interrupt.
- Keep questions open and to a minimum; do not ask leading questions.
- Never promise confidentiality.

### **Reporting and Recording Disclosures:**

- Report to the DSP, Senior Master or NG.
- Record the date and time of the disclosure and put into some context how the child came to say what has happened / is happening.
- Record verbatim what the child said, as soon as possible after the disclosure; keep the recording factual and objective.
- Where there is visible bruising/injury; describe what you have seen and where on the child's body. Do not ask the child to remove clothing.
- Describe your observations of the child, describing his emotional state and behaviour.
- All information is confidential and once passed onto the DSP there is no right to further knowledge.
- Where the DSP makes an oral referral to the Local Authority Children's Social Care service, which he will do within 24 hours, he will confirm it in writing within 48 hours.

### **Confidentiality and Information Sharing**

All confidential issues relating to children and young people should be dealt with on a *need to know* basis. Therefore only specifically relevant information should be passed on to the recipient, who in turn may not pass this information onto another individual, without consulting the informant.

All information given by the child is confidential at all times and once a report is made any further action taken will not be disclosed to members of staff. Before a referral to Social Services is made, an assessment of disclosure needs to be carried out by the DSP who can seek advice from the Lead Officer for Safeguarding Schools & Social Care. If a child does not consent to the disclosure of information, then the DSP can override the duty of confidentiality in order to safeguard the welfare of the child. If appropriate, consent can be gained from the parent if this is deemed not to put the child at risk.

Only relevant members of staff in schools need to know the details of concerns relating to a child in need i.e. the DSP, form teacher and anyone involved in monitoring particular aspects of a child's behaviour such as the matrons. The boy concerned should also know which teachers/staff are in possession of what information, when it will be shared, why and with whom.

### **Monitoring**

The DSP or, if a Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has been used, the Lead Professional will set a timescale for monitoring a child about whom a concern has been expressed (approximately half a term or 6–8 weeks). If no indicators are found or appear to develop, the monitoring will cease. If indicators and concerns continue, appropriate action will be taken and recorded. As part of good practice, parents/carers will be advised that their child is to be monitored and involved in the process as much as possible. If a child is on a child protection plan information will be shared with the Social Services.

Any deficiencies or weaknesses identified in the school's child protection arrangements will be remedied without delay.

The Governing Body will undertake an annual review of the school's Safeguarding policy and procedures and of the efficiency with which the related duties have been discharged. This will take the form of an annual report by the Headmaster to the Governors and scrutiny of the procedures by the NG.

## ***INTERACTION WITH PUPILS – GUIDANCE FOR STAFF***

### INTRODUCTION

The safety and well-being of every pupil at the school is of paramount importance. Every child has the right to grow up and to live in a safe environment. All staff have a duty to protect pupils from abuse and bullying and to promote their well-being.

Every member of staff should read this code of conduct in conjunction with the school's Statement on Child Protection Policy. Staff are invited to review this code of conduct annually, and copies are sent to the Governors.

### SAFER RECRUITMENT

The school follows the Government's guidelines for the safer employment of staff who work with children. We obtain enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) certificates on all new members of staff, temporary staff, visiting and peripatetic staff, contractors' employees, such as catering staff, who work unsupervised in the school. Governors and anyone else who has regular unsupervised access to children are also required to have up to date CRB certificates. CRB certificates would also be required for the adult members of the families of members of staff who are accommodated on site. More details are set out in the governors' recruitment policy.

New staff and Governors receive child protection training as part of their induction process. This training is repeated at not more than three yearly intervals.

### CHILD PROTECTION OFFICER

Jonathan Milton, the Headmaster, is the school's Child Protection Officer (CPO). He has been fully trained for the demands of this role and inter-Agency working. S/he regularly attends courses with other child support agencies to ensure that he/she remains conversant with best practice. He undergoes refresher training every two years, and maintains close links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) for Westminster. He reports at least once a year to the Governors on child protection issues.

The school's records on child protection are kept locked in the Headmaster's office, and are separated from routine pupil records. Access is restricted to the CPO and the Governor responsible for CP issues.

### PROMOTING AWARENESS

Our curriculum and pastoral systems, enhanced by the form system are designed to foster the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all our pupils. All our teaching staff play a vital role in this process, helping to ensure that all of our pupils relate well to one another and feel safe and comfortable within the school. We expect all the teaching and medical staff to lead by example, and to play a full part in promoting an awareness that is appropriate to their age amongst all our pupils on issues relating to health, safety

and well-being. All the staff, including all non-teaching staff, have an important role in insisting that our pupils always adhere to the standards of behaviour set out in our behaviour policy and in enforcing our anti-bullying policy. Boarding house staff have a particularly important role to play.

Time is allocated in PSHCE and Form time to discussions of what constitutes appropriate behaviour and on why bullying and lack of respect for others is never right. Assemblies, drama and RS lessons are used to promote tolerance and mutual respect and understanding. The ICT curriculum teaches boys about the unacceptability of cyber bullying and abusive behaviour and to promote the safe use of the internet and mobile phones, inside and outside of school.

### ROLE OF SENIOR PUPILS

All senior boys are given basic leadership training that includes making sure that the younger pupils are kept safe, and on the appropriate action that they should take if they discover that a pupil is being bullied or abused.

### INTERACTION WITH PUPILS

In general, pupils should be encouraged to discuss with their parents or guardians issues that are troubling them. It may be appropriate to suggest that a pupil sees the School Counsellor or member of the medical staff.

Staff need to ensure that their behaviour does not inadvertently lay them open to allegations of abuse. They need to treat all pupils with respect and try, as far as possible, not to be alone with a child or young person. Where this is not possible, for example, in an instrumental music lesson, or sports coaching lesson, it is good practice to ensure that others are within earshot. Where possible, a gap or barrier should be maintained between teacher and child at all times. Any physical contact should be the minimum required for care, instruction or restraint. Staff should avoid taking one pupil on his/her own in a car.

#### Communication with Pupils

Staff should not give their personal mobile phone numbers to pupils, nor should they communicate with them by text message or personal email. If they need to speak to a pupil by telephone, they should use one of the school's telephones. The Group Leader on all trips and visits involving an overnight stay should take a school mobile phone with him/her. The school mobile should be used for any contact with pupils that may be necessary. The Group leader will delete any record of pupils' mobile phone numbers at the end of the trip or visit.

#### Physical Restraint

Any physical restraint is only permissible when a child is in imminent danger of inflicting an injury on himself or on another, and then only as a last resort, when all efforts to diffuse the situation have failed. Another member of staff should, if possible, be present to act as a witness. All incidents of the use of physical restraint should be recorded in writing and reported immediately to the headmaster who will decide what to do next.

See also RESTRAINT policy

#### IF A PUPIL REPORTS ABUSE

Pupils who have a problem may speak to someone whom they trust. It is important that the member of

staff sets the boundaries firmly at the outset of such a conversation, making it clear that no one can offer absolute confidentiality. A pupil who is insistent upon confidentiality should be referred to an external source, such as ChildLine (details are given in the booklet, "Guidance Notes for Pupils", a copy of which is given to each boy annually. If the pupil is only prepared to speak if absolute confidentiality is guaranteed, the member of staff should terminate the conversation at that point. The adult should provide the CPO with a written account of what has transpired as a matter of urgency.

If a pupil decides to speak to a member of staff about the fact that either he, or a pupil known to them, is being bullied, harassed and abused, the member of staff should:

- React professionally, and remember that they are not carrying out an investigation, (which is a task for specialists),
- Take what the child says seriously, and calmly, without becoming emotionally involved,
- Make it clear why unconditional confidentiality cannot be offered, ,
- Explain that any adult member of staff is obliged to inform the CPO, if there child protection or safeguarding issues are involved, in order that specialist help can be arranged.
- Encourage the pupil to speak directly to the CPO,
- Explain that only those who have a professional "need to know" will be told, and, if appropriate, measures will be set up to protect the pupil from retaliation and further abuse,
- Reassure the child that he was right to tell, and that he is not to blame for having being bullied or abused,
- Allow the child to tell his or her own story, without asking detailed or leading questions
- Record what has been said,
- Inform the CPO as soon as possible - at least by the end of the morning/afternoon session of that day.
- Inform the Headmaster immediately in cases where abuse from a member of staff is alleged, or if the incident happened inside the school, or on a school trip. (If the Headmaster is unavailable – or is involved - the Chairman of Governors should be told immediately).

Where there are evident signs of physical injury, that may (or may not) be the result of abuse or bullying, medical help should be summoned. In serious cases, the Police should be informed from the outset.

#### ROLE OF SCHOOL MEDICAL STAFF

Health professionals in a school operate within their own professional guidelines, which include an obligation to refer cases of abuse to the CPO.

### ACTION TO PROTECT THE CHILD

Information about possible abuse may come to a member of staff in several ways - direct allegation from a child that has been abused, through a friend, relative or other child, through a child's behaviour or through observation of an injury to the child.

In the case of an allegation being made by the child concerned or by a third party it is important to remember that:

- Defendants have been acquitted where leading questioning or inappropriate investigation has been proven.
- It is vital that subsequent enquiries should not be prejudiced by detailed questioning in school.

The CPO will consider how best to support and monitor the pupil concerned through any process of investigation, liaising closely with parents, carers, Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), or other agencies involved to identify the support strategies that will be appropriate.

### Whistle-Blowing

If a teacher or member of staff has concerns about the behaviour of another member of staff towards a pupil, he or she should report it at once to the Headmaster. Any concern will be thoroughly investigated under the school's whistle-blowing procedures. If there is evidence of criminal activity, the Police will always be informed. Wherever possible, and subject to the rights of the pupil, the member of staff will be informed of the outcome of the investigation. No one who reports a genuine concern in good faith needs to fear retribution.

### Confidentiality

A member of staff who uses the whistle-blowing procedure is entitled to have his/her name protected from being disclosed by the Headmaster to the alleged perpetrator, without his/her prior approval. However, it has to be recognised that his/her evidence may be required by the Police to be used in any criminal proceedings.

### WHERE A MEMBER OF STAFF HAS CONCERNS ABOUT A PUPIL

If a teacher or other member of staff has concerns about any pupil or incident that touches upon child protection issues, he or she should report them as soon as possible to the CPO.

### DEFINITION OF ABUSE

Abuse can affect children of all ages, sexes, different races and cultures and all social classes. In some cases behaviours or physical injuries suggest clearly that abuse is occurring but in others the signs will be less apparent.

Four categories of abuse are recognised in legislation:

- physical abuse

- neglect
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse

The NSPCC defines child abuse as:

*“Child abuse is the term used when an adult harms a child or a young person under the age of 18.....Child abuse can take four forms, all of which can cause long term damage to a child: physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and child sexual abuse. Bullying and domestic violence are also forms of child abuse.*

*“A child may be experiencing abuse if he or she is:*

- *Frequently dirty, hungry or inadequately dressed*
- *Left in unsafe situations, or without medical attention*
- *Constantly “put down,” insulted, sworn at or humiliated*
- *Seems afraid of parents or carers*
- *Severely bruised or injured*
- *Displays sexual behaviour which doesn't seem appropriate for their age*
- *Growing up in a home where there is domestic violence*
- *Living with parents or carers involved in serious drug or alcohol abuse”*

*“Remember, this list does not cover every child abuse possibility. You may have seen other things in the child's behaviour in circumstances that worry you.”*

*“Abuse is always wrong and it is never the young person's fault.”*

The severity of impact on a child is believed to increase the longer the abuse continues, the more extensive the abuse, and the older the child.

## SYMPTOMS

The NSPCC lists some of the signs and behaviours which may indicate that a child is being abused:

- repeated minor injuries
- children who are dirty, smelly, poorly clothed or who appear underfed
- children who have lingering illnesses which are not attended to, deterioration in school work, or significant changes in behaviour, aggressive behaviour, severe tantrums
- an air of 'detachment' or 'don't care' attitude
- overly compliant behaviour
- a 'watchful attitude'

- sexually explicit behaviour (e.g. playing games and showing awareness which is inappropriate for the child's age), continual open masturbation, aggressive and inappropriate sex play
- a child who is reluctant to go home, or is kept away from school for no apparent reason
- does not trust adults, particularly those who are close
- 'tummy pains' with no medical reason
- eating problems, including over-eating, loss of appetite
- disturbed sleep, nightmares, bed wetting
- running away from home, suicide attempts
- self inflicted wounds
- reverting to younger behaviour
- depression, withdrawal
- relationships between child and adults which are secretive and exclude others

These signs are not evidence themselves; but may be a warning, particularly if a child exhibits several of them or a pattern emerges. It is important to remember that there may be other explanations for a child showing such signs. Abuse is not easy to diagnose, even for experts.

### PARENTS

In general, we believe that parents should be informed about any concerns regarding their children. It is important that we are honest and open in our dealings with them. However, concerns of this nature must be referred to the CPO, who will decide on the appropriate response. In a very few cases, it may not be right to inform them of our concerns immediately as that action could prejudice any investigation, or place the child at further risk. In such cases, advice will be sought from the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).

### REMEMBER

Your aim should be to establish as quickly and accurately as possible the details of the injury or abuse. Questioning should be brief and gentle using open rather than closed questions ("How did it happen?" rather than "Did [ ] hit you?"). Keep a note of what you heard and saw.

**BETTER STILL . . . . .** with care and sensitivity, pass the pupil to the CPO immediately.

**Child protection is always our top priority.**

Useful Contact Details

**Independent Safeguarding Authority:** PO Box 181, Darlington DL1 9FA (tel: 0300 123111)

**Social Services Duty & Assessment Team:** 020 7641 7560

**Local Authority Designated Officer-Westminster:** Carla Acket ([cacket@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:cacket@westminster.gov.uk)) 020 7641 7665

**OFSTED:** 0300 123 4666

# When to worry about a child – Possible Signs of Abuse

*It's not always obvious when a child is being abused. There may be specific signs or your instinct may tell you something is wrong. Experts can use these indicators to assess how at risk a child is, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant your concern. Below are some of the more common issues and signs.*

## **Worrying signs in a child's behaviour**

Being emotionally withdrawn or aggressive are just two signs that NSPCC Helpline advisors think about when they take a call about a child. They are not a sure-fire way of identifying children who have been badly treated but they may indicate some form of abuse or neglect.

### **Does the child seem 'normal' for their age?**

Every child is different. They have their own needs and develop at their own pace. But when you look at them alongside others of a similar age, do they appear to behave as you would expect? If they seem noticeably younger – socially, or in the language they use – or if they seem much older for their age, for example in terms of their sexual behaviour, that may be as a result of an unhealthy relationship with someone.

### **Do they seem emotionally or socially withdrawn?**

Some children are naturally shy. But there's a difference between shyness and being emotionally withdrawn. Children who are emotionally withdrawn have real, chronic trouble expressing how they feel to an adult or to another child. They may refuse to do so, and even go out of their way to avoid talking to or being with others. If a child is emotionally withdrawn, they may be trying to cope with very strong feelings and/or dealing with a powerful distrust of other people.

### **Are they unusually aggressive?**

Is a child often very aggressive, whether physically or in the words they use? They may have been influenced to believe that this is normal behaviour. They may have witnessed violence at home or elsewhere in their life, or feel the need to protect themselves from something.

## **Worrying signs in a child's physical appearance**

Signs of being hurt or dirty are just a couple of concerns that NSPCC Helpline advisors consider when they take a call about a child. They are not a sure-fire way of identifying children who have been badly treated, but they may indicate some form of abuse or neglect.

### **Does the child seem dirty or smelly?**

A child can easily become dirty, when they play sport for example. But if they often seem unclean or smelly for no clear reason, it could be that they are not being given the chance to get clean. Their clothes may not be washed regularly and they may even be denied the chance to have a bath or shower.

### **Are they bruised or cut in any way?**

It's not currently illegal to smack a child but it is against the law to hit them in a way that leaves any lasting mark or **causes injury**. It goes without saying that a parent or carer should never hurt their child in any way, especially if it leaves cuts or bruises on their skin.

## **Worrying signs in a child's home environment**

### **Is the child left at home by themselves?**

There is no law regarding the minimum age that a child can be left home alone – but it is an offence if doing so leaves them in danger. So there are many things to consider when you notice a child at home by themselves. Assessors will think about their age and maturity, as well as **how long and how often the child is left alone**. For example, a child under the age of 12 is probably not able to cope by themselves in an emergency. Whilst it might be fine to leave a 16-year-old alone for an evening, it would not be right for them to be left alone for a week.

### **Are they left out late at night?**

It's a normal, healthy part of growing up for a child to play outside with other children and, depending upon their age, with a limited amount of adult supervision. But if left by themselves after what might be considered too long or at a time when they should normally be at home or in bed; they may not be getting the care they need.

### **Is their home clean and tidy?**

It's natural for busy family homes to be untidy or in need of a clean sometimes. But if it is extremely untidy or often very dirty, a child's health and wellbeing may be at risk. If the family cannot cope with these tasks then they may not be making sure their child is clean or properly fed.

## **Worrying signs in a family relationship**

### **Does the child spend time with their family?**

If a child rarely spends time with their family, they may be trying to avoid a situation in which they could be hurt in some way. Or a parent or carer may be failing to properly care for their needs.

### **Do they seem to have a good relationship?**

When seen together, does the child appear comfortable with their parents, carers or other family members? Do they seem to get along? If the child seems very uncomfortable or nervous, they may feel afraid of being too close to a family member. If you see a child acting aggressively towards a member of their family, it may be because they feel the need to distance themselves. It's natural for families to argue now and again. But if you see or hear the child being shouted at violently, or being hit, it's important to act to protect them.