





- Data Protection Act 1998
- GDPR 2018
- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Children Act 2004
- The Care Act 2014
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Protection Of Freedoms Act 2012
- Relevant government guidance on safeguarding children

#### **4. We recognise that**

- The welfare of the child or young person is paramount, as enshrined in the Children Act 1989
- Safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone within the organisation
- All children, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, have a right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse
- Some children are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, their level of dependency, communication needs or other issues
- Working in partnership with children, young people, their parents, carers and other agencies is essential in promoting young people's welfare.

#### **5. Safeguarding risks**

A 'child' is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday as defined by The Children Act 2004. 'Children' therefore in the context of this policy means children and young people.

An 'adult at risk' is a person who is 18 years of age or over and:

- a) has needs for care and support (whether or not the local authority is meeting any of those needs) and;
- b) is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect; and
- c) as a result of those care and support needs is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of abuse or neglect

Safeguarding is the action that is taken to promote the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk and protect them from abuse.



Abuse is any behaviour towards a person or act of omission that causes him or her harm, endangers life or violates his or her rights. Abuse can take place in any setting, public or private, and can be perpetuated by anyone.

Abuse can include:

- Physical abuse
- Domestic violence
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Financial or material abuse
- Modern slavery
- Discriminatory abuse
- Organisational abuse
- Neglect and acts of omission
- Self-neglect

We also recognise that children and young people face other specific risks and challenges including child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation (FGM), radicalisation and extremism (PREVENT), and gang involvement.

Further details about types of abuse are given in Appendix 2.

## **6. The Weir Link will endeavour to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults by:**

- Adopting child protection and safeguarding practices through procedures and a code of conduct for staff and volunteers via the frontline providers we partner with
- Developing and implementing an effective e-safety policy and related procedures
- Providing effective management for staff and volunteers through supervision, support and training
- Recruiting staff and volunteers safely, ensuring all necessary checks are made
- Sharing information about child protection and good practice with children, parents, staff and volunteers
- Sharing concerns with agencies who need to know, and involving parents and children appropriately

## **7. Who is responsible?**

Everyone working within the organisation including volunteers, Trustees and staff are responsible for safeguarding and must have read our policies and procedures and be given appropriate training.

Lizzie Taczalski is the designated safeguarding officer and Rachel Stokes is the Safeguarding Lead. They can be contacted by phone at The Weir Link office, 020



8765 2481 and Lizzie Taczalski's email address is [lizzie.taczalski@theweirlink.org.uk](mailto:lizzie.taczalski@theweirlink.org.uk). All The Weir Link staff and volunteers have responsibility for ensuring effective safeguarding and protection procedures. All designated persons have received appropriate level training in the safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults.

- Designated Safeguarding Officer – also to have undertaken Designated safeguarding officer training
- Designated Safeguarding Lead – also to have undertaken regular face to face training.

The role of the designated person is to:

- Receive and record information from staff, volunteers, beneficiaries who have a safeguarding concern;
- Assess the information properly, carefully and sensitively in alignment with current legislation clarifying or obtaining more information about the matter as appropriate, and consulting with senior colleagues if necessary;
- Consult initially with Lambeth social services designated safeguarding officers regarding any doubts or concerns as soon as possible and as advised make a formal referral without delay.

Specialist advice and training is made available to designated persons.

## **8. Allegation of abuse made against staff**

**It is a legal requirement to inform Lambeth Local Authority about any allegations of abuse made against a member of staff. The Disclosure and Barring Service may also need to be informed.**

Parents have the right to make a formal complaint against the action of The Weir Link and/or its employees and such complaints will be dealt with in line with our Complaints Procedures.

Where it is alleged that a member of staff (including volunteers) has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child including incidents that may have happened in a person's private life
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates he or she would pose a risk of harm to children.

The matter will be dealt with in line with the allegations procedures as set out in Part Four of Keeping Children Safe in Education (2019). Allegations against staff must be brought immediately to the attention of the Board of Trustees. The Trustees will only



carry out initial enquiries (**not an investigation**) prior to a discussion with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

Any allegation relating to the Designated Safeguarding Officer **must** be brought to the attention of the Chair of Trustees who will consult LADO.

## 9. Consent and sharing of information

Where harm or abuse has been suspected, The Weir Link's representatives will make clear to the person at risk that we have a duty to report a safeguarding concern, and that confidential information will need to be shared with relevant professionals. In effect, we are not asking for consent to share information. We may lawfully disclose information to a third party if it can be justified to be in the public interest such as to:

- Protect the person at risk from significant harm
- Promote the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk.
- Ensure that the person at risk understands what information will be shared, why it needs to be shared, who will see the information and what they will use it for.
- Under the GDPR, data controllers must refer to the age a person is no longer considered a child in the UK (currently age 16) and cannot seek consent from anyone under that age. Instead, they must obtain consent from a person holding "parental responsibility". They must also make "reasonable efforts" to verify that the person providing that consent is indeed a parental figure.

## 10. Reporting and recording procedure

Anyone who suspects that someone may be experiencing or at risk of abuse, as described by the the following bullet points, **must report their concern immediately**. The procedure for reporting any concerns is outlined in Appendix 1 of this document.

- Behaved in a way that has harmed or is thought to have the potential to harm another person
- Behaved in a way towards another person that indicates they are not suitable to work on behalf of The Weir Link
- Is thought or suspected to have acted in a way that might put the safety and wellbeing of another person at risk including if there is a concern that a criminal offence may have taken place

People have the right to expect that information shared with a member of staff should be treated as confidential. However, it should be made clear that where the staff



member has a reason to be concerned for someone's welfare they **must** share the information with someone who is in a position to take action or responsibility.

It is not the responsibility of anyone working within The Weir Link in a paid or unpaid capacity to decide whether or not abuse has taken place.

It is the responsibility of anyone working within The Weir Link in a paid or unpaid capacity to raise all cases of suspected or alleged abuse in line with the procedures identified in this policy. It is important to do this as there may already have been concerns expressed by other organisations or members of staff and failure to report concerns may put a vulnerable person at risk.

- a) Any disclosure or suspicion of abuse should be reported to your line manager in the first instance, who will then discuss with the Designated Safeguarding Officer of The Weir Link. If the concern relates to the Designated Safeguarding Officer an alert should be made to The Weir Link's Chair of Trustees.
- b) The person responsible for overseeing the safeguarding concerns will ensure that the Safeguarding process is followed (see below).
- c) If disclosure of abuse is made by a service user, care should be taken to explain to them the procedure that will be followed and they should be told that it may not be possible for The Weir Link to maintain confidentiality.
- d) **All relevant information about the allegation should be recorded using the reporting form (Appendix 1) as clearly as possible and stored securely.**

## 11. Electronic/Digital Safety

Our aim is to:

- Protect children and young people who receive The Weir Link's services and who make use of information technology (such as mobile phones, games consoles and the internet) as part of their involvement with us
- Provide staff and volunteers with the principles that guide our approach to e-safety
- Protect professionals
- Ensure that, as an organisation, we operate in line with our values and within the law in terms of how we use information technology

We recognise that:

- The welfare of the children/young people who come into contact with our services is paramount and governs our approach to the use and management of information communications technologies



Mobile phones and digital devices can present a number of problems when not used appropriately

- Phones and personal devices can allow internet access and bypass the centre security settings and filtering
- Mobile phones with integrated cameras could lead to child protection, bullying and data protection issues with regard to inappropriate capture, use or distribution of images of children or staff.

Our staff and volunteers will endeavour to:

- Ensure all electronic communications are appropriate and professional.
- If using electronic technology as a group activity ensure that an adult worker knows and understands what is happening within the group.
- Do not make any relationship with a child (other than family members) through a social networking site.
- Maintain a log of all electronic contact with individuals or groups including messaging and texting.

### Photography and videography

We will not allow others to photograph or film children or young people during an activity without the parent's permission.

We will not allow images of pupils to be used on websites, publicity, or press releases, without express permission from the parent, and if we do obtain such permission. We will not identify individual children by name.

### Cameras/videos

It is not the intention to prevent parents/carers from taking pictures and videos, but to ensure that photographic practices are monitored and to reduce the risks of inappropriate photography/filming.

No one is permitted to photograph or record images in the following areas:

- Changing areas
- Toilet areas
- Children /young people can only be photographed if permission of parents/carers is given
- Those taking photos, including staff/volunteers must identify themselves
- Staff should not use personal devices such as mobile phones or cameras to take photos or videos of the children and will only use designated equipment for this purpose.



- Photographers will be required to have formal identification which must be worn at all times
- Children's/young people's images will not be used for promotional or press releases unless parents/carers have consented
- Unsupervised access to children/young people or one-to-one photo sessions are prohibited
- Photo sessions outside the organisation/organisation's activities or at a child's/young person's home are not allowed
- Personal details which might make a child/young person vulnerable, for example, address, email address, phone number, should never be revealed.

### Mobile phones

- Parents, carers and visitors are requested not to use their mobile phones while on the premises. Staff will remind parents of the policy by asking them to leave the activity room and take calls in the foyer when necessary.
- Parents are also requested to avoid giving their children access to their mobile phones for other activities particularly any that involve access to the internet.
- Staff should not have mobile phones with them whilst working with children at The Weir Link.
- Staff mobile phones should be kept in bags and used only when staff are on break time in the staff room or outside the setting.
- Staff are not permitted to use their personal mobile phones for contacting The Weir Link's families outside the setting in a professional capacity.
- The Weir Link's landline should be used for staff expecting a personal call or as an emergency contact and The Weir Link's mobile may be used when working off site.

### 12. Conclusion

The Weir Link will work with other agencies to prevent the abuse of children, young people and adults at risk and to respond quickly when abuse is suspected. The following sources of information and advice can be consulted when the guidance provided in this document is insufficient to support clear decision making:

- [London Child Protection Procedures and Practice Guidance](#)
- [Pan London Multi-Agency Adult Safeguarding Policy and Procedures](#)
- Janna Kay, Quality and Safeguarding Adults Manager, Lambeth Council, [jkay@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:jkay@lambeth.gov.uk)
- For adults concerned about a child, contact the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000
- Steve Tippell, PREVENT Programme Manager, [stippell@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:stippell@lambeth.gov.uk).
- <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection>





- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-policy-protecting-vulnerable-adults>
- [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk)
- <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/adult-pocket-guide.pdf>

The Lambeth Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) has referral guidance and threshold information and chart.

<https://www.lambethsaferchildren.org.uk/safeguarding-referral>

Additional information and Guidance resources, in the event of online/cyber abuse:

- <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/tutors>
- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safeguarding-and-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>
- <https://swgfl.org.uk/resources/safe-remote-learning/>
- <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

Free guidance can be accessed through the [Professionals Online Safety Helpline](#) which supports the online safeguarding of both children and professionals. Call 0344 381 4772 or email [helpline@saferinternet.org.uk](mailto:helpline@saferinternet.org.uk). The helpline is open from Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm.

## Appendix 1 – Safeguarding Reporting Checklist

This checklist is designed to be used as a guide to report a safeguarding concern about a child, young person or adult at risk to Lambeth Council, in line with the procedure outlined in The Weir Link's Safeguarding Policy.

**Ensure that this form and the information on it are stored securely in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018.**

### Your role

- do not promise confidentiality
- listen, and do not interrupt, if the child/parent/carer is recalling significant events
- keep calm and be patient
- ask questions to clarify what the child/parent/carer is saying, questions should be framed in an open manner and not lead the child/parent/carer in any way



- do not be intimidated or afraid of talking to a child/parent/carer about child protection issues - this may mean the difference in their lives that they are looking for
- reassure the child/parent/carer that they have done the right thing by telling you
- tell them what you are going to do next
- make a note of the conversation as soon as is reasonably practical (but within 1 hour)

**RECORD the following information about the person at risk:**

- First name
- Surname
- Date of Birth
- Address
- Telephone number
- Does the person live alone?

**RECORD the following information about the safeguarding concern**

- A description of the abuse, including where and when it happened
- Information about how the person's care and support needs mean they are unable to protect themselves
- Where the person at risk is now and whether they are safe
- Details about the person or organisation that might pose a risk
- Do they know you are raising a safeguarding alert with Lambeth Social Services? Do we have their consent to contact Lambeth Social Services?
- What does the person at risk want to have happen?
- Are there others (children, young people or adults) who may be affected by this situation?
- Whether you think a crime has been committed, and if yes, if the police are aware?
- Whether you have told or reported this matter to anyone else (e.g. Care Quality Commission or service provider).

**REPORT** - to the Designated Safeguarding Officer - **do not** hesitate when reporting. You must interrupt the member of staff immediately, no matter what the circumstances and clearly state you need to report a safeguarding issue. Remember you may not know all the information about this child/family and your information could make a very significant difference to a child's life.



You will receive information from the Designated Safeguarding Officer about the action they will take/have taken. **If you are not satisfied with the outcome and you still have concerns regarding the child's welfare you are responsible for contacting Children's Social Care or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).** (See Key Contacts - below)

**If the Designated Safeguarding Officer is the alleged abuser contact Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).** (See Key Contacts - below)

### **YOU MUST REFER FOR THE FOLLOWING CONCERNS:**

- **THERE IS CLEAR EVIDENCE OF ABUSE OR CONCERN FOR A CHILD'S IMMEDIATE SAFETY** (eg. If a child has indicated they have been hit by an adult and there is a mark or a bruise)
- **A CHILD MAY BE IN NEED, INCLUDING CONCERNS ABOUT SIGNIFICANT HARM**
- **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE** - where a child has witnessed domestic violence or is in need, suffered significant harm or risk of suffering significant harm due to DV, see [Barnardo's domestic violence risk identification](#)
- **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE** - where there is a child under 12 months old or an unborn child (even if the child was **not** present) any single incident of domestic violence must trigger a referral to Social Care.
- **SUSPICIOUS INJURY REQUIRING URGENT MEDICAL TREATMENT** - In circumstances where a child has a suspicious injury that requires urgent medical attention, the Child Protection referral process should not delay, the administration of first aid or emergency assistance. If a child is thought to be at immediate risk (because of parental violence or intoxication, for example) urgent police intervention should be requested.

**CHILD SUBJECT TO A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN** – Particular vigilance will be exercised in respect of children who are subject to a Child Protection Plan and any incidents or concern involving these children will be reported immediately to Social Care and confirmed in writing. This will also be the case for other children who may be considered vulnerable such as disabled children, SEN children or Children Looked After or Previously Looked After for example. In all cases of injury to a child consideration will always be given as to whether an urgent paediatric medical assessment is required to document injuries or to protect any forensic evidence.

Where it is suspected that a child may be at further risk of significant harm if the parent is spoken to, nothing will be said to the child's parent/carer without first discussing the matter with Lambeth Children's Social Care Integrated Referral Hub (IRH).



All staff must understand that there are no circumstances under which a member of staff may promise a child that they will keep any disclosure a secret or confidential – they must always pass this information on in the best interest of the child.

**YOU MUST ACT AND CONTACT CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IMMEDIATELY, IF A CRIME HAS BEEN COMMITTED CONTACT THE POLICE MAKING A REFERRAL.**

### **LOCAL AUTHORITY CONTACTS**

**Lambeth Integrated Referral Hub: 020 7926 3100**

Out of hours: 020 7926 1000

**Local Authority Safeguarding Lead (primary schools): Sarwan Singh Jandu**

020 2926 9643

Mobile: 07976 490 051

**Local Authority Safeguarding Lead (early years provision): Kathryn Shaw**

020 7926 9643

Mobile: 07908 119 631

### **Local Authority Designated Officer**

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) supports staff across all organisations who work with children and young people if any concerns arise regarding any practitioner who works with children and young people.

Threshold for potential referral in respect of a person working with children to the LADO has 3 criteria:

1. Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child;
2. Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
3. Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children.

To be considered an allegation, the alleged incident has to be **sufficiently serious** as to suggest that harm has or may have been caused to a child/ren or that the alleged behaviour indicates the individual may pose a risk of harm to children (or otherwise meet the criteria above). Issues that do not meet this threshold may constitute conduct or disciplinary issues and should be addressed by employers using appropriate organisational procedures.



If a practitioner has concerns regarding the conduct of a colleague then they should in the first instance report this to the Designated Safeguarding Lead within their own organisation, who is required by law to report this concern to the LADO.

**Local Authority Designated Officer: Andrew Zachariades**

020 7926 4679

Mobile: 07720 828 700

Download the **Allegations Referral Form** from

<https://www.lambethsaferchildren.org.uk/lado-referrals>, complete the form with as much detail as possible, and email it to [LADO@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:LADO@lambeth.gov.uk) and [helpandprotection@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:helpandprotection@lambeth.gov.uk).

Always phone the LADO after completing the Referral Form to check

- the hazards and dangers,
- safety plan, and
- intervention

## **Appendix 2 - Understanding and identifying abuse and neglect**

The four main categories of abuse are **physical, sexual, emotional abuse** and **neglect**.

### **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child

#### **Some possible signs of physical abuse:**

- Unexplained injuries, for example, bruising, bite marks, burns and fractures, particular if recurrent.
- Improbable explanations given for injuries.
- Several explanations provided for an injury.
- Refusal to discuss injuries.
- Untreated injuries.
- Withdrawal from physical contact.
- Admission of punishment which seems excessive or inappropriate
- Shrinking from physical contact or flinching
- Fear of going home or of a parent/carer being contacted

- Fear of undressing or changing or being changed
- Fear of medical help
- Aggression/bullying
- Over-compliant behaviour or a 'watchful attitude'
- Running away
- Significant changes in behaviour with no explanation
- Unexplained patterns of attendance
- Covering up i.e. wearing seasonally inappropriate clothing
- Signs of physical discomfort without explanation
- Female genital mutilation- partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or injury to the female genital organs

### **Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent effects on the child's emotional development, and may involve: Conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person; Imposing age or developmentally inappropriate expectations on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction; Seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another e.g. where there is domestic abuse; Serious bullying, causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger; Exploiting and corrupting children.

Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

### **Some possible signs of emotional abuse:**

- Continual self-deprecation, low self esteem
- Fear of new situations, beyond what would be appropriate
- Inappropriate emotional responses to new, difficult or painful situations
- Self-harm (this can present in young children as well as older ones)
- Compulsive stealing, scrounging
- Obsessive behaviours such as rocking or thumb-sucking
- Detachment – 'Don't care' attitude
- Social isolation – does not join in and does not have friends
- Attention-seeking behaviour beyond what would be age appropriate
- Eating problems including lack of appetite or over-eating
- Depression, withdrawal
- Inability to concentrate





- Aggression, anger, anxiety, tearfulness

**Child sexual exploitation** is a form of sexual abuse where children are sexually exploited for money, power or status. It can involve violent, humiliating and degrading sexual assaults. In some cases, young people are persuaded or forced into exchanging sexual activity for money, drugs, gifts, affection or status. Consent cannot be given, even where a child may believe they are voluntarily engaging in sexual activity with the person who is exploiting them. Child sexual exploitation doesn't always involve physical contact and can happen online. A significant number of children who are victims of sexual exploitation go missing from home, care and education at some point.

#### **Some possible signs of sexual exploitation**

- Children who appear with unexplained gifts or new possessions
- Children who associate with other young people involved in exploitation
- Children who have older boyfriends or girlfriends
- Children who suffer from sexually transmitted infections or become pregnant
- Children who suffer from changes in emotional well-being
- Children who misuse drugs and alcohol
- Children who go missing for periods of time or regularly come home late
- Children who regularly miss school or education or don't take part in education

#### **Neglect**

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and / or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance misuse, maternal mental ill health or learning difficulties or a cluster of such issues. Where there is domestic abuse and violence towards a carer, the needs of the child may be neglected. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent failing to:

- Provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment);
- Protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger;
- Ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers);
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional, social and educational needs

#### **Some possible signs of neglect:**

- Constant or frequent hunger
- Small stature or growth or, in babies or young children, not meeting milestones with no medical explanation





- Poor personal hygiene – in babies or young children this might present as always having nappy rash or regularly being left in dirty, soiled clothes/underwear
- Frequently being sent to school or nursery when ill
- Inappropriate clothing (too large, too small, clothes for the opposite gender)
- Frequent lateness or non-attendance
- Medical needs not met or treatment not sought
- Low self-esteem, sense of unworthiness
- Poor social and peer relationships
- Constant tiredness or hunger
- Compulsive stealing or scrounging
- Constant lack of response or interest from parent/carer
- Under-achieving at school or nursery
- High and unusual levels of anxiety or being preoccupied

### **Bullying**

Bullying can also be a type of abuse. Bullying is the abuse and/or intimidation by a person, people or an organisation against another or others. It may be a specific act or it may be institutional. It is an abuse of a perceived power relationship. Children can also bully other children. Bullying may include verbal abuse and intimidation, acts of physical or sexual abuse and coercion, e-bullying, through texting, filming on mobiles and posting on social networks. Whatever its form it is unacceptable. It must be challenged and appropriately addressed.

### **Some possible signs of bullying:**

- Reluctance to attend activities previously enjoyed.
- Tearfulness, depression, erratic emotions, loss of concentration.
- Stomach aches, headaches, difficulty in sleeping, bed-wetting, bruising, cuts scratches, damaged clothing, bingeing on food, alcohol or cigarettes.
- Shortage of money, frequent loss of possessions.
- Asks for money or starts stealing (to pay bully/ies)
- Drop in performance.

### **Domestic Violence**

The Home Office definition of Domestic violence and abuse was updated in May 2018 as:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to



- Psychological;
- Physical;
- Sexual;
- Financial;
- Emotional.

**Controlling behaviour** is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

**Coercive behaviour** is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim."

This definition includes so called *honour* based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

All agencies need to work together to identify and protect these children/young people.

It has been widely understood for some time that coercive control is a core part of domestic violence and it is important to recognise coercive control as a complex pattern of overlapping and repeated abuse perpetrated within a context of power and control.

The main characteristic of domestic violence is that the behaviour is intentional and is calculated to exercise power and control within a relationship. Seeing or overhearing violence to another person in the home has adverse effects on a child's development and welfare. Unborn children are also at increased risk; domestic violence is a prime cause of miscarriage, still birth, premature birth, foetal psychological damage, foetal physical injury and foetal death.

Children of all ages living with a parent, most often the mother, who is experiencing domestic violence, are vulnerable to significant harm through physical, sexual, emotional abuse and / or neglect.

### **Significant harm**

The legal definition of significant harm includes "the harm that children suffer by seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another, particularly in the home".

Professionals should apply the London Safeguarding Children Board guidance to all situations of domestic violence, for example, where it is perpetrated by women or girls against men and boys, within same sex relationships and from a child.



Professionals should be aware of the possibility that adolescents could be experiencing violence within intimate partner relationship.

### **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**

The World Health Organisation defines FGM as: “all procedures (not operations) which involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons”

**FGM is a criminal offence in the UK. It is also illegal to take a child abroad to undergo FGM. A child for whom FGM is planned is at risk of significant harm through physical and emotional abuse.**

Where a child is thought to be at risk of FGM, practitioners need to act quickly before the child is abused through the FGM procedure in the UK or taken abroad to undergo the procedure.

### **Spirit Possession or Witchcraft**

Spirit possession is when parents, families and the child believe that an evil force has entered a child and is controlling them; the belief includes the child being able to use the evil force to harm others.

A child may suffer emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect if they are labelled and treated as being possessed with an evil spirit. Significant harm may occur when an attempt is made to ‘exorcise’ or ‘deliver’ the evil spirit from the child. Dismissing the belief may be harmful to the child involved.

### **Forced Marriage**

Forced marriage, as distinct from a consensual arranged one, is a marriage conducted without the full consent of both parties and where duress is a factor. Duress cannot be justified on religious or cultural grounds. A child who is being forced into marriage is at risk of significant harm through physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

Suspicious that a child may be forced into marriage include: A family history of older siblings leaving education early and marrying early; depressive behaviour including self-harming and attempted suicide; being kept at home by their parents; being unable to complete their education; a child always being accompanied including to school and doctors’ appointments; a child talking about an upcoming family holiday that they are worried about; a child directly disclosing that they are worried they will be forced to marry.

Where a suspicion or allegation of forced marriage or intended forced marriage is raised, there may be only one opportunity to speak to a potential victim, so an



appropriate initial response is vital. Professionals should not minimize the potential risk of harm or attempt to be a mediator. Professionals should see the child immediately, on their own, in a secure and private place and contact The Weir Link's Designated Safeguarding Lead.

### **Honour Based Violence**

The Metropolitan Police definition of so-called honour based violence is: 'a crime or incident, which has or may been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community'. Honour based violence cuts across all cultures and communities.

The perceived immoral behaviour which could precipitate a murder include: Inappropriate make-up or dress; the existence of a boyfriend; kissing or intimacy in a public place; rejecting a forced marriage; pregnancy outside of marriage; being a victim of rape; interfaith relationships; leaving a spouse or seeking divorce.

A child who is at risk of honour based violence is at significant risk of physical harm (including being murdered) and/or neglect, and may also suffer significant emotional harm through the threat of violence or witnessing violence directed towards a sibling or other family member.

Murders in the name of 'so-called honour' are often the culmination of a series of events over a period of time and are planned. These include: House arrest and excessive restrictions; denial of access to the telephone, internet, passport and friends; threats to kill; pressure to go abroad. There tends to be a degree of premeditation, family conspiracy and a belief that the victim deserved to die.

When receiving a disclosure from a child, professionals should recognise the seriousness / immediacy of the risk of harm. Professionals should not minimize the potential risk of harm or attempt to be a mediator. Professionals should see the child immediately, on their own, in a secure and private place and contact the agency's named child protection person.

### **Vulnerability of Disabled Children**

Research indicates that children with special educational needs or disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse. This may be for the following reasons:

- Attitudes and assumptions can lead to the denial or failure to report abuse
- Reluctance to challenge carers – misplaced empathy
- Seeing abuse as attributable to the stress and difficulties of caring for a disabled child
- Beliefs that abuse does not impact on disabled children in the same way
- Double standards – unsatisfactory situations accepted for disabled children

- Dependency – exposure to a wide range of carers for personal and intimate care
- Isolation – easier for abuse and neglect to remain hidden
- Lack of participation and choice in decision making – disempowered and less likely to complain
- Especially vulnerable to bullying and intimidation
- Behaviours misconstrued as part of child's disability
- Communication barriers – may make it difficult to tell others what is happening
- Judgements made about a child's ability to communicate not based on accurate information and specialist advice
- Child's preferred method of communication not recognised / equipment and / or facilitation not available
- Communication aids don't contain the necessary words to help a child describe an experience of abuse

**In addition to the above some possible signs of abuse for disabled children are:**

- Bruising on sites that may not be concerning on a non-disabled child
- Not getting enough help with feeding
- Over or under medicating
- Poor hygiene and personal care arrangements
- Rough handling / excessive restraint
- Lack of stimulation
- Unwillingness to learn a child's means of communication
- Ill-fitting equipment / invasive procedures which are unnecessary or carried out against the child's will

**Children harming other children**

It is part of our duty of care that we make sure children are protected from harm from other children. Please refer to the *Behaviour Policy* for managing these incidents. If you think that a child is targeting another child, it is important to raise this with the Manager immediately.

In recording and reporting incidents it is important that the identity of the child that did the hurting is not disclosed. This is part of our duty of confidentiality to all children and families. If a parent asks who has hurt their child, show understanding of their upset, anger or pain but explain that we are not able to share this information.