



# Protecting Children and Young People from Abuse & Neglect

Information for  
members of the public



[www.childprotectionnorthayrshire.info](http://www.childprotectionnorthayrshire.info)



## We need your help to keep all our children safe and protected

Thankfully, most children are safe in their families and other relationships. However, unfortunately, some families struggle to keep their children safe and protected. This is where you come in.

Children need other people to look out for them and to do something if they are concerned. This booklet will give you the information you might need to feel confident to take action to help a vulnerable child.



### What does child protection mean?

Child protection means protecting a child from abuse or neglect.

#### Abuse and neglect includes:

- physical abuse, such as being hit, shaken, thrown or burned
- emotional abuse, such as being constantly criticised and put down
- sexual abuse, such as being inappropriately touched or shown indecent images
- neglect, such as not being properly looked after.

All children and young people have a right to be protected from abuse and neglect and all adults can help to keep them safe.

Children often find it very difficult to ask for help themselves so they rely on adults around them to notice something might be wrong and to do something about it.



## Does child abuse and neglect happen where I live?

Child abuse and neglect can happen in any kind of family and in any kind of neighbourhood.

Parenting can be hard. There are lots of different reasons why some parents cannot meet the needs of their child and keep them safe. These reasons affect all different kinds of people.

## Do families have a right to privacy?

Of course families have a right to privacy.  
**And children have a right to be safe.**

If there are concerns that a child might not be safe, services may need to get involved with the family to ensure the right support is provided to help them keep their child safe.

We know that families can find it upsetting to have concerns raised about their child. We work to strict guidelines so that a family's privacy can be respected as much as possible, while ensuring the child is safe.



## Should child protection be left to the professionals?

No – professionals can't do this alone – **we need your help.**

There is lots of help and support around for families but it can be hard for them to ask for help. Sometimes this means a child can be left at risk because no one has asked for help for them.

Some support can only be offered after we know a child needs help.

If you know that a child might need help and you tell someone, this means that the child can get the help they need.

## What should I look out for?

### You might notice a child:

- Has an unexplained injury or bruising in an unusual place
- Seems afraid, quiet or withdrawn
- Is afraid to go home
- Appears hungry, tired or not dressed for the weather
- Has been left alone
- Has too much responsibility for their age
- Is misusing drugs or alcohol

**Sometimes it might be something about parents and carers that worries you. For example:**

- Misusing alcohol or drugs
- Violent behaviour within the home
- Struggling to cope with managing the care of their child

Sometimes a child might tell you something directly. This may be hard for you, especially if they ask you not to tell anyone else.

But remember if that child is at risk, you might be the only person who has the information to stop that child coming to harm.

If you have any worries about a child, it is very important that you tell someone quickly. Don't wait until you are certain something is wrong – this could be too late. If families get help early enough, this stops things getting worse.

**What if I'm wrong?**

It is never wrong to tell someone you are worried about a child.

When you tell a worker that you are worried about a child, this gives them a chance to work out whether or not the child needs any help.

We don't expect you to make the decision whether or not a child is being abused or neglected. We will only know if this might be happening when we join all the pieces of information together.

If you don't tell someone when you are worried about a child, we might miss a chance to check a child is okay.

**Who do I contact if I am worried about a child?**

Phone your local Social Services office:

- **Irvine - 01294 310300**
- **Kilbirnie / North Coast - 01505 684551**
- **Saltcoats / Stevenson / Ardrossan - 01294 605261**
- **Arran - 01770 600742**

If you are not sure which of the above offices to call, call the Irvine number in the first instance

**If phoning after 5pm, or at the weekend/during holidays, call: 0800 328 7758**

**If a child is in danger, for example if a young child is left in a house by themselves, it is best to contact the Police directly:**

101 (or 999 in an emergency)



We understand it can be quite scary to make a phone call about a child to Social Services or the Police.

You might find it easier to talk to someone you already know, such as your health visitor, child's teacher or your own social worker. Any of these people will listen to your worries and they will guide you on the best action to take or may share the information for you.

If you are unsure and would like to talk through your concerns first, you can call ParentLine Scotland on 08000 28 22 23.

If you are worried about a child and feel they might have no one they feel able to talk to, you could suggest they call ChildLine for support on 0800 1111.

### What do I say?

Tell whoever answers the phone that you are worried about a child. You will be asked:

- What is the child's name, age and address?
- What are you worried about and why?
- What are the parent's names and where are they?
- Where is the child at the moment?
- Do you have any other information about the child or the family that would be helpful in deciding what action to take?

Don't worry if you can't answer all these questions. That is not important. It is important that you at least make the call if you are worried about a child.

### What if I don't want to give my name?

**You don't have to give your name if you don't want to.**

It is helpful to have your details because someone might want to phone you back to check something. But, don't delay in sharing a concern about a child because you are worried you won't remain anonymous – you can withhold your name if you wish. We will still follow up your concerns for the child.



### What happens next?

When you phone Social Services or the Police and say you are worried about a child, they will always:

- Carefully write down everything you tell them and keep this information on their system
- Look to see what other information they already have about that child and family
- Ask other people who know the family about the current circumstances of the child and family
- Take action that is in the best interests of the child

Social Services and/or the Police will only become involved with families where it is necessary to protect the child.

Sometimes this means they will visit the family to see and speak to the child and make sure that the child is safe.

Sometimes this means that someone who already knows the family, like a health visitor or teacher, will check that the family are coping okay or whether they need extra support.

Sometimes nothing more will happen. Sometimes your call has given people the chance to check the child is okay and agree that nothing more needs to be done.

### Will the child be taken into care?

Children are rarely removed from their families and this only happens when they are not safe at home or where there has been agreement with parents due to personal circumstances.

When a child is removed from their family after someone has reported a concern, this means that the person was absolutely right to call because that child was in danger.

**Without that call, the child might have been harmed.**



### What if I make things worse?

Telling someone you are worried about a child is a good way to stop things getting worse for the child.

It is natural for parents to be upset that someone has contacted Social Services about their children.

We can work with parents to help them understand why people are worried and we can work with them to make things better for the child.

### Will I find out what has happened?

Not in any detail. Because of a family's right to privacy, you won't be told the detail of what has happened after you have told someone you are worried about a child. But, you will know that your phone call has helped to either check a child is safe or make a child safer. We will provide you with some general feedback whenever possible.

### Is there anything more I can do?

We all appreciate a bit of a helping hand now and then. If you know of a family who might be starting to struggle, think about what you can offer as a neighbour or friend. Sometimes listening to a parent's worries or offering to babysit for a short while can make a big difference.

## Gemma's Story



Gemma is five years old and lives with her mum and dad. Her neighbours were worried because they could hear a lot of arguments in the house and Gemma crying often. One day, they heard a man's voice swearing at Gemma and he sounded very threatening. The neighbour phoned Social Services to say they were not sure what was happening at home but were worried about Gemma due to the shouting, swearing and her crying a lot.

Social Services contacted Gemma's school to see if they had any information to add to what the neighbour had told them. The headteacher said they had noticed a very recent change in Gemma. She started Primary one as a very confident, chatty girl, but in recent weeks had become much quieter and yesterday had been very weepy but couldn't say what was upsetting her.

Social Services also checked their records to see if there was any other information known about the family. They found that when Gemma was a baby, the police were called to the house twice because of violent arguments. These were caused by dad drinking heavily. At the time he agreed to speak to his GP

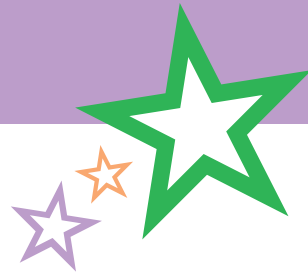
about help with his alcohol misuse and there had been no further incidents. The health visitor had provided additional support to the family at the time and she monitored Gemma's well-being and development.

Social Services visited the family to talk about the recent change in Gemma's behaviour and the reports of arguments at home. At first, the parents denied anything was wrong and said people were just trying to cause trouble. The social worker continued to talk about Gemma and told the family that they knew there had been previous concerns about dad drinking heavily and violent arguments. The social worker asked if this might be happening again.

After further discussion, the parents admitted dad was drinking heavily again and this was causing arguments. They hadn't realised how much this was upsetting Gemma. Dad went back to his GP and this time he kept attending the alcohol support group even after he felt more in control of his drinking.

The parents said afterwards that they were embarrassed and angry that Social Services came to their door. But mum said she'd been trying to convince dad to go back for alcohol counselling and he kept refusing. Dad said he'd probably never have gone back if it wasn't for the shock of Social Services visiting and then realising how much Gemma was affected by what was happening.

Gemma said, "Mummy and daddy give each other lots of cuddles and don't shout at me anymore".



## Liam's Story

Liam is three years old and lives with his mum, who has just given birth to another baby boy. The children's father is in prison.

Liam's mum gets extra support from her midwife and health visitor as she used drugs before the children were born and she is a bit anxious coping alone with two young children.

Liam goes to nursery five afternoons a week and staff support his development. He gets speech and language support at the nursery because he needs extra help with his speech.

The nursery noticed Liam's attendance had dropped a bit. When they talked to his mum about this, she has either said Liam's not feeling well or that she's really busy.

Liam's speech wasn't developing as well as expected and he started to have toilet accidents after being toilet trained for several months.

Nursery staff and the health visitor were a little worried about Liam but nothing seemed to have changed to explain why he was no longer making progress.

One of his mum's neighbours had a social worker. She told her social worker that she noticed lots of young people going into Liam's house at night and there seemed to be noisy parties going on until the early hours of the morning. She also said she recognised some of the young people who are known locally for using drugs.

The social worker contacted Liam's nursery and health visitor to discuss this information. The concerns about Liam's lack of progress in nursery made sense. They were worried that Liam's mum was feeling lonely and may be more likely to let people use her house as a place to drink and take drugs.

They agreed that because the nursery staff knew the family best, they would speak to Liam's mum. When they spoke to her, they concentrated on Liam's well-being and talked to her about how lonely it can feel looking after young children on your own.

The nursery explained to Liam's mum that they ran parenting groups where she could get to know other mums a bit better and get support with raising two young children. She reluctantly joined the group and ended up going every week and also became a parent helper in the nursery.

Later, Liam's mum described how nervous she had been about going to a group as she felt really awkward in new situations. She said she was really glad she'd been encouraged to go as it turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to her. As well as making new friends, she's learned a lot of cooking and baking skills from the classes and hopes to get a job in catering once the children start school. She's stopped letting young people use her house to drink and use drugs.

Liam's mum said: "I usually hate going to groups or anything like that – I'm just nervous with people I don't know. But the other people were lovely and made me feel welcome. I don't hang about with any of the old crowd now. I want better for my kids than a mum who's off her face half the time. I want my kids to be proud of me."



## Sharon's Story

Sharon is 13 and lives with her mum. They have had contact with Social Services on and off for a number of years because Sharon's school attendance is poor and her mum experiences periods of low mood and anxiety which can affect her parenting.

Sharon's mum has got a new boyfriend who is spending a lot of time in the house. Sharon feels he makes her mum feel worse because he constantly criticises her and tries to control where she goes and who she sees.

Sharon's friend went round to visit her but Sharon said she couldn't come in as there had just been a big family argument. Her friend seen that Sharon had been crying and that she had a big bruise on her face. Later she text Sharon to ask what happened and Sharon told her that her mum's boyfriend had hit her.

Sharon's mum kept her off school next day because of the bruising. Neither Education nor Social Services knew what had happened.

Social Services received a call from a woman who said her daughter is friends with Sharon and Sharon has told her that her mum's boyfriend has hit her.

The family social worker visited immediately and found Sharon and her mum at home. Sharon had bruising on her face. The social worker spoke to Sharon on her own and

Sharon said it was mum's boyfriend. Her mum denied this and said Sharon got the injuries fighting outside.

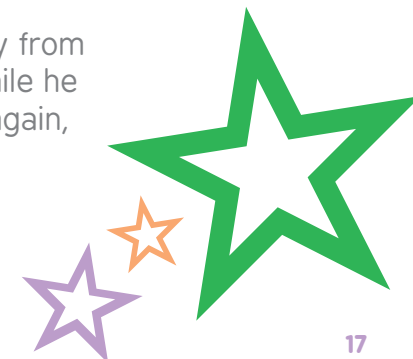
Despite further discussion, Sharon's mum refused to accept that her boyfriend was a risk to Sharon and she wouldn't agree to stop him coming to the house.

Sharon was taken into care because it wasn't safe for her to stay at home and there were no relatives able to look after her. She kept going to her own school and kept in touch with her friends. Her attendance improved significantly and she began to enjoy school more and felt like she was making progress.

Her mum's boyfriend was charged by the police for assaulting Sharon. The social worker continued to work with her mum and she finally accepted that her boyfriend was a risk to Sharon and herself and she agreed to separate. Sharon returned home to her care and a plan was put in place to make sure she remained safe.

Sharon's mum remained angry that someone reported her boyfriend to the police. However, Sharon is very grateful to her friends mum for getting the family the help they needed.

Sharon said: "It was horrible being away from my mum but I just couldn't live there while he was there. Me and my mum are close again, plus I'm getting good marks in my tests at school. Thank goodness he is out of our lives".



## Sam's Story

Sam was only six months old the first time he was left alone at home. His mum was struggling to cope with looking after a baby but she didn't tell anyone how she was feeling, nor did she ask for help.

Instead she went out to meet friends, telling them she had found a good babysitter.

Neighbours began to hear Sam crying in the evenings for longer periods of time. Then they noticed they would sometimes see mum arrive or leave the house without him.

They wondered who was with the baby when his mum was not. They worried that no one seemed to be comforting him when he cried.

They did not speak to anyone about their worries.

When he was nine months old, Sam died. The neglect by his mum played a big part in causing his death.

### **Don't leave it too late.**

*If you have any worries at all about a child, please talk to someone NOW.*



## About North Ayrshire Child Protection Committee

North Ayrshire Child Protection Committee is a partnership between North Ayrshire Council, NHS Ayrshire and Arran, Police Scotland, the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and the Voluntary Sector. The Committee makes sure that all agencies work together to protect children and young people in North Ayrshire.

You can find more information about North Ayrshire Child Protection Committee or about child protection by logging onto our website:

**[www.childprotectionnorthayrshire.info](http://www.childprotectionnorthayrshire.info)**

If you have young children you might want to support them in keeping safe by logging onto:

**[www.cpckids.co.uk](http://www.cpckids.co.uk)**

We also have a website specifically aimed at young people:

**[www.cpcteens.co.uk](http://www.cpcteens.co.uk)**

## Training

North Ayrshire Child Protection Committee provides FREE child protection training to staff working in North Ayrshire.

We have a "Protecting Children in Community Groups" course available for members of the public who work or volunteer in sports and community groups, such as football coaches, Brownie leaders and youth workers.

To find out more visit the training page of our website.

For support call:

**ChildLine - 0800 1111**

**ParentLine Scotland - 08000 28 22 23**

If you are worried about a child call:

*IMMINENT DANGER*

- **Police - 999**

*SOCIAL SERVICES*

- **Irvine - 01294 310300**
- **Kilbirnie - 01505 684551**
- **3 Towns - 01294 605261**
- **Arran - 01770 600742**
- **Ayrshire Out of Hours - 0800 328 7758**



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