

The Right Support at the Right Time



How we help families and safeguard children

Wigan's Safeguarding Continuum Document

Foreword

*I am pleased to introduce “**The Right Support at the Right Time**”, Wigan’s safeguarding continuum guidance for practitioners working with children, young people and families.*

Across Wigan, we share a clear and collective ambition: that every child grows up safe, supported and able to achieve their full potential. This document is an important part of delivering that ambition. It provides a shared framework to help us recognise need early, respond proportionately, and ensure that families receive the right help, in the right way, at the right time.

*At the heart of this guidance is our commitment to **relational practice**. We know that positive outcomes for children are built on strong, trusting relationships—between practitioners and families, and between partner agencies. By listening carefully, working openly and honestly, and recognising the strengths within families, we can support meaningful and lasting change.*

*This document reflects our borough-wide approach of **Progress with Unity**. It emphasises working together as one system, where no single service holds all the answers, but where collaboration, mutual respect and professional curiosity drive better outcomes. It recognises the complexity of family life and the importance of understanding each child’s lived experience within their unique context.*

*Importantly, this is not a checklist. It is a tool to **support professional judgement**, encourage high-quality conversations, and guide decision-making. Whether needs are emerging, escalating or require statutory intervention, this framework helps us act consistently, confidently and with clarity.*

*As we continue to embed our **Family Safeguarding** model and wider reforms such as **Family Help** and strengthened multi-agency working, this guidance will support practitioners to navigate change while keeping children at the centre of everything we do.*

I would like to thank all partners across Wigan who have contributed to the development of this document. Your expertise, dedication and shared commitment to children and families are what make this work possible.

Together, by working with compassion, curiosity and determination, we can ensure that children and families in Wigan receive the support they need—when they need it most.



Colette Dutton,
Director – Children and Families

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Purpose of this document

This framework helps practitioners to consider children and families holistically. Taking into account relationships, living circumstances, and the influence of wider systems.

It is not intended to be used as a checklist. Instead, it supports decision-making about:

- when a child might need additional support
- the type of help that would be most appropriate
- when safeguarding or protection measures are necessary

The framework encourages:

- consistent and clear responses
- support that is proportionate to need
- recognition of the complexities within family life

It can be applied at any stage of practice and complements existing local safeguarding arrangements and services.

At its core, this guidance aims to enhance the quality of conversations with children, families, and professionals. The goal is to ensure support is timely, coordinated, and focused on what is most important for the child.

It acknowledges that:

- every family has unique circumstances
- needs can evolve over time
- effective support often involves multiple services working together

Practitioners should continue to make use of supervision and seek guidance within their own organisations when concerns arise.

How we work with families in Wigan: Progress with Unity



What **Progress With Unity** means for children and families in Wigan:

- Work in a way which recognises that all parents/carers face difficult times and situations at points in their lives and will need help and support.
- Always do the right thing for children and families, offering a helping hand.
- Take pride in working as 'one team' for children and families.

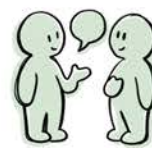
Underpinning this will be our collective commitment to:

- Collaboration and mutually respectful challenge
- Inclusivity and cultural competence (including faith, ethnicity and heritage)
- Being empathetic and offering a helping hand to people, with a clear purpose
- Taking a strengths-based approach while recognizing the impact of intergenerational trauma
- Co-location and active information sharing

The North West approach to working with families



We agree that change happens best through strong relationships.



We are committed to working alongside families, not doing things to them. Building trust and working together leads to better outcomes.



We recognise that every family is different. Support should reflect each family's unique experiences, including the impact of inequality and disadvantage.



No single service can meet all needs. We work together across agencies to provide joined-up support.



We understand that risk cannot be completely removed. Instead, we aim to make balanced and informed decisions that keep children as safe as possible.



We recognise that power, privilege, and bias can affect how support is offered and received. Being aware of this helps us work more fairly and effectively.



We are committed to making all environments where children spend time—both in person and online—as safe as possible.



As professionals, we bring our own experiences and values into our work. We reflect on these and understand how they influence our practice.

Wigan's Model of Practice – Family Safeguarding



Family Safeguarding launched in Wigan in 2024 and is a whole family, strengths-based approach to working with parents/carers and children/young people.

We will work in a way which is empathic and aspirational to support families to create and sustain change. We will work directly with parents/carers and with children/young people focussing on building positive relationships with them and understanding what their daily life looks and feel like and focus on their goals for the future.

We will speak openly and honestly with parents/carers and children/young people and use language which is clear to explain any concerns that have been raised.

For more information about the Family Safeguarding model please click the links below:

[Family Safeguarding Guide](#)

[Introduction to Family Safeguarding](#)

[Impact of Family Safeguarding](#)

[What is Family Safeguarding video with Introduction to Motivational Interviewing](#)

WSCP also offers Family Safeguarding Briefings for professionals across the Wigan Partnership via our Virtual College Training Platform

Relational Practice



Relational practice is about building positive, respectful relationships with children and families so that we can work together to understand what is happening and decide what support is needed next.

By working closely together, we can agree on:

What the worries or concerns are

What needs to change

Who can help and how that support will be provided

We understand that families can sometimes feel under pressure or worried, and this can affect how people respond. Some may feel anxious, upset, or unsure, while others may find it hard to talk about their situation. Feelings such as shame or guilt can also make it more difficult to accept help.

By recognising this, practitioners aim to listen without judgement, show empathy, and build trust. This helps create stronger relationships so that families feel supported and involved. The same approach is used between professionals, working together in a positive and supportive way to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and families.

Changes at National Level

The Families First Partnership (FFP) is part of a national approach supported by the Department for Education, designed to help us work together more effectively for children and families. Our aim is to create a more joined-up, family-focused system that offers the right help at the right time.

By working in partnership, we can keep children safe, strengthen families, and make it easier for everyone to access the support they need in the neighbourhood.

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM), empowers families to develop their own plans and solutions. It involves:

- Offering families the opportunity to meet and develop their own plan to keep children safe and well
- Facilitated meetings that include extended family and close friends
- A focus on early, proactive solutions

FGDM recognises that families often know best how to support their children and should be empowered to take the lead wherever possible.

FGDM is the overall term that covers Family Network Meeting (FNM) and Family Group Conferencing (FGC). Family network meetings can be held by any practitioner at any point – FGC is a referral to Family Group Conference Coordinator and is the mandated ask in the reforms to offer at the point of considering care proceedings (or sooner).

Family Help is the new, reformed approach to supporting children and families as part of FFP. It brings together what used to be Early Help and Child in Need into one seamless system of support, making it easier for families to get the right help at the right time.

Family Help features:

- Multi-disciplinary neighbourhood-based teams with professional from the local authority, health, police, education and community groups, meeting the needs of families including children with SEND.
- A Family Help Lead Practitioner who coordinates support and builds trusted relationships with families. These FHLP's can be from various disciplines including social workers and alternatively qualified.
- A single assessment and plan, reducing duplication and making it easier for families to navigate services.

Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs) enable faster, more coordinated responses.

These teams will:

include experienced professionals from social care, police, health and education who can provide expert advice and join across the system.

Share responsibility for child protection decision-making and planning.

Focus on timely, proportionate responses to risk, with clear thresholds and accountability.

This model aims to reduce delays, improve information sharing and ensure that children at risk receive coordinated, effective protection and builds on our strong local partnerships.

What this means for practice:

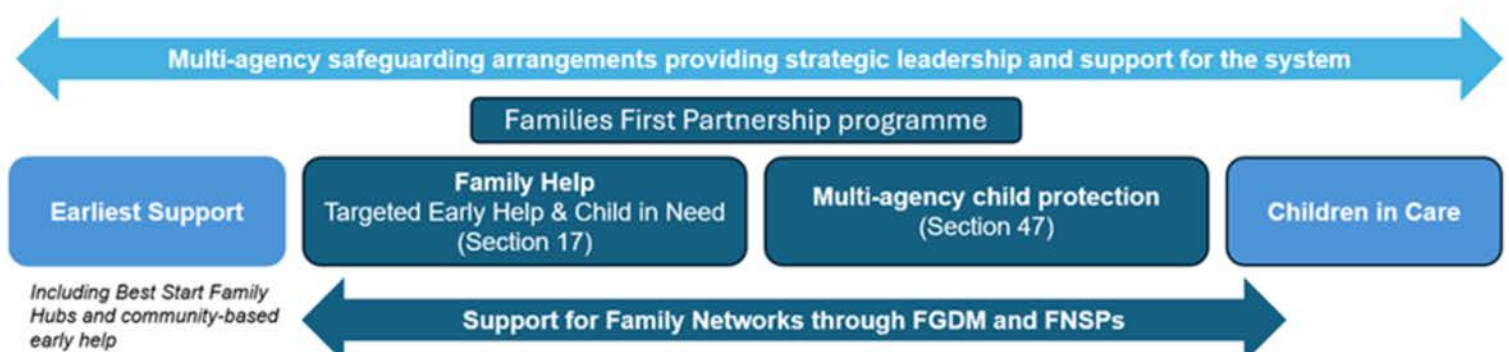
Even better joint working

Practitioners from different agencies will work as one team around the child

Families should experience fewer handovers and more consistent relationships

The system will become simpler, earlier and more relational

How the Department for Education currently illustrates this system:



What this looks like in Wigan



Indicators of possible need

The indicators on the following pages help practitioners identify appropriate support for babies, children, young people, and families, encouraging early access to free, non-judgemental help before needs escalate. They are prompts for reflection and discussion—not a checklist, and should be used alongside multi-agency information sharing, understanding of the child’s lived experience, and professional judgement. No single indicator, or combination, should be viewed in isolation, and their presence or absence alone does not determine the level of support needed.

Universal and early family help

Indicators of possible need

Health

- Child is physically healthy, with development largely on track and any concerns manageable through community services
- Child is registered with a GP and accesses health services appropriately, including routine appointments (e.g. GP, dentist, immunisations)
- Immunisations and developmental checks are up to date
- Pre- and post-natal health needs are being met (where relevant)
- Daily routines support the child's wellbeing, including nutrition, hygiene and sleep
- Caregivers are able to meet the child's health needs, with no identified additional needs impacting care

Safety in the Home, Employment & Finance

- The child lives in a safe, clean and stable home environment
- Accommodation is suitable, well-maintained and has basic, required amenities
- The child is appropriately supervised and there are no known safeguarding risks associated with adults in or around the home
- Daily routines support positive behaviour and age-appropriate use of technology and social media
- Household finances are stable and not contributing to additional pressures on the child or family

Young Carer

- The child is not acting as a young carer
- Caring needs within the household are being met by adults or appropriate services
- The child's development, education and wellbeing are not impacted by caring responsibilities

Relationships & Emotional Development

- The child has good emotional wellbeing and mental health and is able to manage feelings in an age-appropriate way
- Relationships with caregivers are stable, supportive and consistent, providing guidance and boundaries
- The child has experienced a recent loss or bereavement and is coping, but would benefit from short-term additional support
- The child is developing age-appropriate emotional, social and practical skills, including empathy, self-control and a positive sense of self
- The child is socially confident, has positive peer relationships and opportunities for friendship and social interaction
- Any minor worries about development can be managed by appropriate services (eg CAMHS, School Health). There may be some early signs of worries or changes in behaviour

Education

- The child attends school regularly, is achieving key educational stages in line with expectations, and there are no unresolved barriers to learning
- Any minor concerns (e.g. confidence, behaviour or friendships) are manageable within the school environment
- The child participates well in learning, meets developmental milestones, and demonstrates a range of skills and interests
- There is a planned and supported pathway beyond compulsory education, linked to future aspirations
- Home and school work together to support learning and educational engagement

Abuse & Neglect

- The child is safe, with their carer protecting them from danger and no identified concerns relating to abuse or neglect
- The carer does not physically harm or use physical punishment on the child
- The child is appropriately supervised and demonstrates age-appropriate, safe behaviours, including online
- Any injuries are consistent with normal childhood activities, with no concerns about physical harm or punishment
- The child shows age-appropriate curiosity and behaviour, with no concerns about sexual abuse, sexualised or harmful behaviour

Disability

- Child has no identified disabilities where the needs cannot be met through community services
- Where carers or family members have disabilities, these do not impact the child's care, development or wellbeing

Substance Use

- The child has no history of substance misuse or dependency (using drink or drugs)
- Carers and family members either do not use drugs or alcohol, or their use does not affect their parenting and they are accessing relevant community services/know how too

Universal and early family help Indicators of possible need

Parent Carer Relationships/How Adults Manage Disagreements

- Family relationships are characterised by mutual respect, the ability to manage emotions (emotional regulation) and resolve disagreements in a healthy way
- No history or incidents of violence, emotional abuse, unequal power or controlling behaviour

Harm or Risks Outside the Family

- If the child occasionally misses school or is out of the home, criminal/sexual or extremist exploitation is not a known or suspected concern
- There are no known or suspected safeguarding risks linked to adults in or around the child's life
- Family facing harassment or discrimination outside the home
- Needing support with inappropriate ideologies while being open to different perspectives
- The child may be more vulnerable to grooming or exploitation in person or online, for example through new friendships, gifts or online contact, and would benefit from early support and guidance
- Carers are able to identify and implement appropriate online safety measures (e.g. parental controls and settings)

Health

- The child is missing some routine health appointments or engagement with services has become less consistent, this includes missed antenatal or postnatal appointments where relevant
- Ongoing health needs or disabilities can be managed in everyday settings, but additional support may be needed
- Concerns about eating, sleep, growth, weight or hygiene are becoming more noticeable
- The child shows increasing signs of loneliness, worry, low mood, anxiety or emotional withdrawal but can be supported in everyday settings, with support from caregivers
- The child is slower to reach expected developmental milestones, or has health needs that are not yet fully supported
- Carers' needs or physical/mental health issues, including postnatal depression, are impacting the care and development of the child
- The child has a disability or complex needs that require specialist or coordinated support to help their development and wellbeing

Family Help

Indicators of possible need

Safety in the Home, Employment & Finance

- Supervision and daily routines are sometimes inconsistent, and extra support would help provide stability
- The condition of the home is starting to decline, is overcrowded or temporary, affecting comfort, routines and a risk of homelessness
- The family is experiencing serious financial strain, including rent arrears or risk of eviction or repossession
- Access to essential services is limited, linked to low income, unemployment or frequent moves
- Recent life changes have led to financial difficulty and barriers to work, and the family may need practical support
- The child is from an asylum seeking or refugee family with additional needs or is in a kinship care arrangement made by their own family, requiring extra guidance and support.

Relationships & Emotional Development

- The child is showing changes in behaviour due to ongoing difficulties in family or peer relationships such as increased frustration, clinginess, or withdrawal. They may present with responses that indicate a need for additional support or intervention, with no suicidal thoughts or intent identified
- Friendships are more difficult, or the child is finding peer pressure harder to manage
- There are early signs of influence from older peers or unsafe social groups
- Emotional support at home is inconsistent, and can be overly critical, with setting clear boundaries being challenging at times impacting the child's development
- The child has come across self-harm-related content online, but with no evidence of self-harm
- The child has low confidence or self-esteem increasing their vulnerability to negative influences
- A parent/carer experiences mild or occasional emotional or mental health difficulties, with support and protective factors in place
- The child has experienced a recent bereavement, with a noticeable impact on behaviour and emotional wellbeing that may require longer-term support.
- Concerns exist regarding the private fostering arrangements for the child, and the local authority has not been notified, raising potential issues about the carer's treatment of the child.

Disability

- The child has some additional health needs that require a level of support
- Parents/carers or family members have disabilities that sometimes affect their ability to provide care and some support or adjustments are needed, but the child is not at risk of harm

Substance Abuse

- Use of alcohol or drugs by adults in the household is beginning to affect parenting, and although the child is currently safe, there are concerns this may worsen if use continues.
- The child or a household member has been found with small amounts of class C drugs
- The child is experimenting with alcohol, smoking or illegal drugs, but the misuse is not currently escalating
- There are concerns about substance use during pregnancy, where relevant

Young Carer

- The child has occasional caring responsibilities that sometimes impact on their opportunities and wellbeing

Family Help

Indicators of possible need

Harm or Risks Outside the Family

- The child is sometimes missing from school or home, raising concerns about time spent with unsafe influences such as drug and alcohol use, antisocial behaviour, or associations with older individuals
- The child has connections with peers involved in criminal activities
- The child is at risk of online grooming or accessing harmful online content without appropriate supervision/safety controls

Parent Carer Relationships/ How Adults Manage Disagreements

- The child is occasionally exposed to arguments or incidents that cause distress at home which may be affecting their wellbeing, but there are some protective factors in place
- A pregnant carer has experienced occasional abuse from their partner, or there is a past history. This can include physical, emotional, sexual, financial and controlling behaviour, and can take place in person or online
- Arguments are frequent and unresolved between adults and the child, or within the household, though there is no clear pattern of one person being harmed by another

Education

- School attendance has reduced over time, with increasing absences or lateness and the reasons aren't yet clear
- The child experiences persistent absence with attendance regularly below 90%, or is not accessing education at all, with concerns about suitability of home education arrangements
- The child is finding it harder to engage in learning and motivation has decreased
- Some developmental milestones are not yet being met, with support in place through everyday services
- The child has experienced repeated school changes or is showing early signs of exclusion risk
- There are concerns about frequent school moves, though any bullying is being appropriately addressed
- The child is struggling with understanding, organisation or problem-solving, affecting progress in learning
- Communication between home and school has become less consistent, with the carer not actively supporting the child's education and extra support may be needed to strengthen this
- Concerns relating to basic care and wellbeing, such as poor hygiene, dirty clothing, hunger, untreated health needs, and social isolation

Abuse and Neglect

- At times, adults in the household find it difficult to keep everyone safe, and extra support could reduce future risk or danger at home, online and in the community
- The child occasionally shows physical signs that raise concerns about care and neglect
- Physical discipline has been used without physical injury, but caregivers are willing to seek help with managing behaviour
- The child is becoming more independent than expected for their age and developmental stage, which may indicate unmet needs
- The child is experiencing more frequent illness, with no known cause or medical explanation
- The child is showing early unhealthy sexual behaviour or is involved in activities that may not be safe for their age

Protection

Indicators of possible need

Health

- The child has serious or long-term health needs that are not consistently managed or left untreated by their carer. This may be linked to missed appointments or limited support
- Some aspects of family routines or lifestyle may be contributing to the child's health difficulties
- There are signs of physical injury, unexplained marks, or unmet basic care needs
- The child has a severe physical and/or mental health condition that significantly affects daily life and requires specialist support; however, the parent is not seeking treatment, increasing the risk of physical/mental health deterioration
- The child has expressed thoughts about suicide, without plan or intent, and has required hospital assessment or service involvement, with parents not accessing support for the child
- The parent or carer is finding it difficult to support the child's health needs, which can lead to high anxiety or using drugs or alcohol to cope
- Developmental milestones are not being met, and the child faces significant challenges, including potential disabilities or other conditions, such as but not limited to, conduct disorder, ADHD, anxiety, depression.
- There has been little or no engagement with antenatal or postnatal care, raising concerns about the support needed to safely care for a baby and indicating the need for a pre-birth assessment.

Relationships and Emotional Development

- The child shows very low self-esteem, trauma-related responses, or withdrawn behaviour, increasing the child's vulnerability to grooming or exploitation and leading to increase negative behaviours
- The home environment is unstable or unpredictable, negatively impacting the child and increasing the child's vulnerability to harm or exploitation
- The child is not consistently emotionally supported, including limited comfort when distressed or experiencing pressure that exceeds their emotional capacity
- The child has accessed online content linked to self-harm and has self-harmed, resulting in injuries
- There are concerns about harmful or controlling relationships affecting the child
- A parent or carer has significant mental health difficulties that affect their ability to care safely, including periods of compulsory treatment and limited support networks
- A parent or carer has shared suicidal thoughts, and there is not plan in place for them and/or the child
- The child displays harmful behaviour, including sexualised behaviour, that may place themselves or others at risk

Disability

- Family disabilities are impacting the consistency and quality of care provided to the child
- Carers are unable to meet the child's needs due to their disabilities and require a significant amount of support.

Young Carer

- Child has regular caring responsibilities that significantly impact their development, wellbeing and life opportunities

Safety in the Home, Employment and Finance

- The child is left alone or without appropriate supervision, placing them at risk
- Home and housing conditions are unsafe or unhygienic, posing a risk of serious harm to the child's health and safety
- There are concerns about carers' ability to consistently protect the child from harm
- Long-term unemployment is significantly affecting parental identity, resilience, and caregiving capacity
- The family is unable to secure employment due to a severe lack of basic skills or long-term substance misuse
- Housing instability or homelessness is affecting the ability to keep the child safe, supervised, and protected from harm

Education

- The child is not meeting expected developmental milestones and requires targeted or specialist support
- The child has significant difficulties with learning, understanding information, and problem-solving, leading to serious underachievement despite current support
- The carer is disengaged from school and resistant to offers of support or intervention
- The carer is working with professionals and following advice but there is still no improvement
- The carer may be struggling to work with or support educational expectations, including making changes at home, unintentionally. This could be linked to wider family pressures or circumstances
- Changes in behaviour, including aggression, reluctance to go home, tiredness, sexualised behaviours, or increased vulnerability

Substance Use

- The child's substance use is severely affecting their physical and mental health, including hospital admissions
- A carer shows little concern about the child's underage use of alcohol, smoking, or drugs
- Substance use within the family is increasing, causing distress, anxiety, fear, or emotional harm to the child
- There is evidence of serious drug involvement, including possession or supply of Class A or B drugs or drug-related items in the home either by the child or household member
- There is evidence of substance use during pregnancy, presenting risks to an unborn baby

Harm or Risks Outside the Family

- There is confirmed or suspected exploitation, including sexual, criminal, county lines involvement, grooming, or trafficking
- The child is frequently missing from home, including episodes where they are missing for long or unexplained periods
- Involvement with extremist or violent groups
- Involvement in gang or organised crime activities

Abuse and Neglect

- The child shows signs of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse
- There are clear physical indicators of neglect, including poor care and unmet basic needs
- The carer is unable to protect their family from danger or significant harm and persistently avoids contact with professionals
- The child has frequent injuries with unclear, inconsistent, or unknown explanations, including injuries caused by physical punishment
- The family is in crisis, with a risk of care arrangements breaking down or carers expressing unwillingness to continue caring for the child
- The child shows an unusually high level of self-reliance that is not appropriate for their age or stage of development
- There are concerns that illness may be fabricated or deliberately caused

Parent Carer Relationships/ How Adults Manage Disagreements

- The child is living in a household where domestic abuse or violence is present or where adults may pose a serious risk. The child is being harmed by seeing or hearing domestic abuse within the family. The adult causing the harm shows little or no understanding of its impact on the child and little evidence of change
- A pregnant parent or carer has experienced repeated or severe domestic abuse
- An adult who has previously used abusive behaviour remains in the household, and there are concerns that abuse may still be happening or that ongoing risks are being downplayed

Resolution Protocol

Wigan Safeguarding Children Partnership have developed the following Resolution protocol to help professionals achieve positive outcomes for children, adults and families. Partnership working is at the core of the work that we undertake, and professional agreement and challenge is central to our day-to-day practice in Safeguarding. This protocol provides a framework to help partner agencies positively resolve issues or challenges and ensure children and families the support they need at the right time.

www.wigansafeguardingchildren.co.uk/professional-zone/policy-procedures

Tools available in Wigan to help you assess specific risks

Graded Care Profile 2 - neglect (NSPCC, with training available from WSCP)

Domestic Violence Risk Identification Matrix (DVRIM) –(Banardos)

WSCP Exploitation Indicator Tool

WSCP Home Safety Toolkit

Child Sexual Abuse Signs and Indicator Template (Centre for Expertise)

WSAB Hoarding Toolkit

Young Carer Appreciative Enquiry Form

Sources of additional information

Wigan Safeguarding Children's Partnership

NSPCC Learning from Case Review Briefings

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel: Learning Hub

Social Care Institute for Excellence: Resources

Research in Practice

Working Together to Safeguard Children

Cultural Atlas



Wigan Safeguarding Children's Partnership would like to thank all Partners who have taken time and collaborated to develop this document.

www.wigansafeguardingchildren.co.uk