



Office of the Children's Rights Director

Young Person's Guide to Keeping Children Safe

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A personal message from the Children's Minister, **Edward Timpson**

In the revised
Working

Together to Safeguard Children guidance, which we published on 21 March 2013, the Government made it very clear that keeping you all safe from harm and improving your life chances is the responsibility of all professionals who work with you. We have spelt out how teachers, the police, doctors, health visitors, social workers and other professionals working with children and families should work together to achieve this. Also set out is what these different professionals can expect from each other. Most importantly this guidance puts the needs of children and young people at its heart – so the system fits and responds to you and not the other way around.

I know how very important this is. I grew up with over 80 foster children and two adopted brothers, who often came from very difficult and troubled backgrounds. Over time, I saw how love, stability and routine helped them settle and thrive. But many of these and other children could have been spared a lot of suffering and long-term damage if they'd got the right help earlier.

This Guide has been written by the Office of the Children's Rights Director, so you too are clear about how professionals should work together to help keep you safe.

Edward Timpson



QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE

Why is it important for me to know this?

It is important that you know what adults should be doing to make sure you are protected from harm. Children and young people told the Children's Rights Director for England that **being kept safe from harm is the most important right they have.**

What should you do if you are worried about your safety?

If you feel you are in immediate danger you should contact the police. If you are worried about anything you can call ChildLine (this is a FREEPHONE number: **0800 1111**), or you can ask to speak to a social worker (you can find one by contacting your local council and asking for children's services).



WHAT IS ABUSE AND NEGLECT?

When people talk about child abuse they usually mean one or more of four things is being done to the child:

Physical abuse – sometimes you might be physically hurt by an adult (**like being beaten, punched, kicked, slapped, scalded with hot water or punished in other ways that cause physical harm**). And, if it wasn't an accident that can only mean that you are being abused. Child abuse means that a person is deliberately being cruel or violent towards you.

Sexual abuse – sometimes someone might touch you in ways you do not like. No one has the right to touch you in a bad way; or force you to touch them or other people. Some adults do some very bad things to children like trying to use them for sex. These people are sometimes called “paedophiles”. **You should always tell someone** if another person is trying to get you involved in anything of a sexual nature. This might also include things which do not involve touching (like involving you in looking at or making sexual images, watching sexual activity or encouraging you to act in sexually inappropriate ways. Sexual abuse is not just done by adult males. Women can also carry out sexual abuse, as can other children.

Emotional abuse – sometimes adults may persistently say or do cruel things intended to upset you (**like putting you down all the**

time or making you feel worthless; or left out). Or you might see or hear the ill-treatment of others. This could leave you feeling very unhappy and not cared for, this is emotional abuse.

Neglect - when people talk about neglect they mean when a child is not getting the things they need – like somewhere safe and warm to live; somewhere to learn and develop; somewhere you will be cared for when you are not feeling well; somewhere you will get enough to eat; somewhere you will be properly looked after; and, not be ignored. Neglect often happens when children are left to care for themselves or care for others such as brothers and sisters all the time.

What about bullying?

Bullying can make you just as unhappy as if you are being abused in some other way. Being called names, being teased, being pushed and pulled about, being hit or attacked, being threatened, having your bag or possessions taken or thrown around, having bad things said about you, being ignored or left out, being forced to hand over money or possessions or being picked on all the time for being different are all things likely to make children extremely unhappy.

You should always tell someone, like an adult who you trust, if you are being bullied and ask them to help put a stop to it.



YOUR RIGHTS

Both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the law in this country say that **children have the right to be safe from any violence, abuse or neglect.**

All children have the right to be

protected from all forms of abuse and neglect, from being sold and forced into work, from being made to work long hours, or being made to feel they are worthless.



WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK THAT I AM BEING ABUSED?

If you think that you, or someone you care about, is being abused you should always tell someone like a trusted adult, the police or a social worker. The law says that **it is their job to do all they can to keep you safe from further harm.** Sometimes it is not easy speaking to the police or a social worker about these things. If you feel this way it is important that you **ask an adult you trust to help you speak out** against your abuse.

Will I be believed if I tell someone?

This is a very important question because many children fear that they won't be believed if they tell someone about abuse. Often, people who abuse children tell them that no one will believe them. This is not true. The police and social workers understand how important it is that they listen very carefully when children are trying to tell them about some of the bad things adults are doing to them.

Sometimes children feel guilty themselves, thinking they have made adults do bad things to them

or should have done something to make it stop. **It is not your fault!!**

Adults who abuse children know exactly what they are doing and it is they, not you, who are responsible for their actions.

What if I'm worried that I'll be taken away from my family?

It is only natural to worry that you may be taken into care, away from your family, friends and school. However, in truth, most social work visits to check that children are being cared for safely do not lead to them being removed from their family home. The police and social workers want to do what is best to make sure that children are safe and properly looked after. The law means that children have the right to be kept safe from being harmed, perhaps by abuse from adults, or because adults do not understand how to look after them.

Each year, only a small number of children are received into care; this **can only happen if this is the best way to help keep children safe from harm.** If you do go into care

everything possible will be done to listen to your views and act on your wishes and feelings. Social workers must plan for you to return home if this is safe for you.

And, if for any reason you can't go back to your parents' care or to

other members of your family, they will help you find you a home where you will have all the personal care you need to enjoy your childhood and grow into a successful adult.



WHAT SHOULD PROFESSIONALS WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN DO TO KEEP YOU SAFE?

These are the things the Government says that professionals should do. They should:

- each **follow the guidance** that has been written by Government; this is called Working Together to Safeguard Children [<http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00213160/working-together-to-safeguard-children>];
- **be able to recognise where there are signs of abuse or neglect;**
- **act quickly on any concerns** to make sure that you are safe (by reporting these immediately to social workers or the police);
- **listen to you**, including about any worries you have about what will happen to you and people you care about;
- **be honest with you** in explaining what will and won't be happening;
- **share any concerns** they have about you with other professionals working with them;
- **share information** with other professionals about what is going on, including any early help that needs to be given to you and your family;
- **share what else they have been able to find out** (often called an 'assessment') so that other professionals can understand better what your needs are;
- work with others to provide the right help for you; and **put a stop to things that may have been harming you;**
- share responsibility with others for deciding what help to give you, and who will be providing this;
- **make sure that other bad things don't happen** in your life (like needlessly being taken from your family, friends or school); and
- **keep on checking** to make sure that the help they are giving is still the right help for you.



WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

When a concern has been reported:

- it must be dealt with by a qualified social worker;
- they must be clear about what the concerns are;
- you must be seen as soon as possible/within a timescale appropriate your needs;
- the social worker must decide, within a day, what to do about the concerns;
- other services, like school, health and housing services, must help where they can;
- the police will look into any crimes that may have been committed;
- where there are child abuse concerns police and social workers will look into these together;
- the person who raised the concerns should be told what is happening;
- the child and family must be told what action will be taken; and
- the social worker working with you and your family will let people know when things will be happening.

If you are suffering abuse or neglect you can expect that a number of people will want to help you. One of these will be a social worker. They will want to visit your family very soon, and also talk to you about any

concerns they have heard about. They will give you a chance to meet with them away from your parents (or carers). You have a right to expect that they will listen to what you have to say, and treat both you and your family with respect.

If immediate action is needed an urgent discussion will take place between social workers, police, health staff and others. They will decide what other information they need to get, how they will share what they already know and what actions they need to take. Immediate action, like going into care, is only likely though if it is not possible for professionals to make a plan to keep you safe where you are.

Professionals working with you will need to find out more about what help you need. They call this an 'assessment'.

What is an 'assessment'?

Doing an assessment means the professionals finding out what they need to know before they can plan how to keep you safe. An assessment is a way of making sure that:

- you and your family get the services you need;
- information is shared between the different services working with you and your family;
- everyone knows who is going to be involved in working with you and your family, and what each will be doing; and

- you get what you need;

Assessments should not go on for too long or keep you waiting for urgent action to keep you safe. The assessment should focus on your individual needs.

The Working Together guidance says that local services must **put**

children first. It explains that **children themselves should have their say** when assessments are being carried out.



WHO MAKES SURE THAT THE SYSTEM IS WORKING FOR YOU?

In the area where you live, the local council has to bring local services together to help plan and agree on how best to keep children in the area safe. It does this by having something called the **Local Safeguarding Children Board** (or LSCB for short). This is a group made up of services working locally with children. It is their job to look at whether:

- children and families are getting the help that they need, including early help;
- local services are doing what the law and guidance say they should be doing to help keep children safe;
- the quality of work done is the highest standard;
- lessons are learned when children do get abused or harmed in the area; and
- local training helps different professionals to keep children safe.



WHERE CAN YOU GO TO GET HELP?

You can always talk to someone at your local children's services department. Check your local council's website or telephone directory for details.

You can also ask your local children's rights or advocacy team for advice and assistance. Check your local council's website for details.

Other useful contacts:

CHILDLINE (if you need to talk to someone confidentially about problems you are having or worries that you might have about other children)

www.childline.org.uk
0800 111

NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO CHILDREN (NSPCC) (for expert advice about child protection)

www.nspcc.org.uk
0808 800 5000

CHILDREN AND FAMILY COURT ADVISORY AND SUPPORT SERVICE (Cafcass) (provides information to help children and young people understand what happens in court)

www.cafcass.gov.uk/children.aspx
0844 353 3350
www.cafcass.gov.uk/teenagers.aspx

CHILD EXPLOITATION AND ONLINE PROTECTION (CEOP)

(provides useful advice about keeping children safe online)

www.thinkuknow.co.uk

ACTION FOR CHILDREN (provides help for vulnerable and neglected children, young people and families)

www.actionforchildren.org.uk
0300 123 2112

CORAM CHILDREN'S LEGAL CENTRE (provides free legal advice to children)

www.childrenslegalcentre.com
08088 020 008

OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS DIRECTOR (OCD) (for help and advice on your rights if you are living away from home at a school or in care)

www.rights4me.org
0800 528 0731

VOICE (provides advocacy and advice to children in care or living away from home)

<http://www.voiceyp.org/young-peoples-zone/advocacy-getting-help> 0808 800 5792



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