

## Part 2 – Portfolio

Case study two explores the details surrounding a 6 year old boy called Ben, who is currently in year 1 at school. Ben is usually a quiet child although enthusiastic during lessons and has been achieving all his educational targets. More recently over the past few weeks, it has been noted that Ben has been wearing dirty clothes, appears unwashed, and has unbrushed teeth and hair. It has also become apparent that he is hungrier than usual and taking larger portions of fruit at snack time. He was later caught taking food from another child's packed lunch, when asked, Ben became quite upset and explained that his mother had not been shopping yet.

### Recognising and recording

The NSPCC (2020) published guidance for professionals on how to spot potential signs of abuse and neglect, which can sometimes be difficult to spot however some common signs might include wearing clothes that hide their body, becoming withdrawn or presenting in unexplained or unusual behaviour which can be seen in Bens eating behaviours in case study two. Davies and Ward (2012) book on Safeguarding children across services, highlights the importance for practitioners in school settings to be particularly alert to children in potential areas of risk, encouraging practitioners to have an awareness of potential signs of abuse, referring to schools and their practitioners as being at the core of initial intervention to safeguarding a child. This is echoed by Blyth and Solomon (2012) who also explore in detail the importance of early intervention to safeguard children, that arises from a failure in parental care and how to recognise warning signs in children. In support of the above, Early years alliance (2015) states the importance of practitioners to know how to recognise at the early stages, respond in the appropriate manners and refer following the correct protocols.

As can be seen in case study two, it highlights the changes in Ben over recent weeks where he appeared to be unwashed, wearing dirty clothes and had unbrushed hair and teeth. Furthermore, Ben appeared to be exceptionally hungry, taking more fruit than usual and was even caught taking food from another child's lunchbox. All these indicators suggest from the NSPCC (2020) guidance that Ben might be a victim of abuse through neglect, as his basic needs of hygiene and having sufficient food do not appear to be met. This form of neglect goes against article 19 of the UNCRC who seeks to ensure that all children should be protected from violence, abuse and neglect, article 24 for all children to have the best possible health including being provided with nutritious food and article 27, which states that every child should have an adequate standard of living that will meet their physical and social needs.

As set out by Welsh Assembly Government (n.d.), observation is a vital and constant role which practitioners should undertake in settings. Early Years Wales (2020) believes that observation is an integral part of practice. During day-to-day observations of the

year 1 class, Ben was identified as having a change in his appearance, and his eating behaviours had altered. According to Pacey (2018) one of the key reasons when observing a child is to be able to monitor and understand any specific issues or changes that have been identified. Hughes and Owen (2009) regard observation as an essential aspect for a practitioner to understand how the child is achieving and behaving. Lindon and Webb (2016) state that during observation, having effective assessment skills is a key proficiency for practitioners to possess when considering children's safeguarding and they claim that when recording information, it should be factual, relevant and concise.

There are several methods that can be used when monitoring children, Estyn's (2014) report on effective classroom observations records several various methods that schools can implement when recording information following observations on children. These range from initial visual recording of information, which can be seen in case study two, basic tick box methods for a fast-tracked recording of information, to a more detailed and tailor-made observation form allowing for subjective data entry, statistical information and additional scope for feedback, targets and concerns. Pacey (2018) lists more examples of good observation techniques including sociograms, timeline records, specific event observations (i.e. dinner play, story time etc) and visual records, these methods reflect in Ben's case study as there is evidence of his previous educational performance and personal behaviours, and how specific events, and a change in Ben's appearance have now highlighted a cause for concern of Bens welfare.

According to Wales Safeguarding Procedures (2019) practitioners have a statutory duty to report and refer if they have knowledge or suspicions that a child may be suffering or at risk of harm. This is also stipulated in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 s.128, where it sets out the obligation for all practitioners to report if there is any or has been any risk or harm to a child. Gathering and recording information accurately is a procedure that practitioners must be confident of within their role and should be child centred to engage fully with the child (Wales Safeguarding Procedures, 2019).

The NSPCC (2024) claims that practitioners should listen carefully and analyse the voice of the child, to ensure that accurate recording is taken and effective actions towards safeguarding are reached. In case study 2, Ben did talk to the teacher, but became upset. Gov.uk (2021) states there should be a strong bond in place between practitioner and child, for them to feel supported when expressing their concerns, and to feel they are being listened to. It is important, as a practitioner, to know what to do if a child does talk to you about a potential abuse situation. NSPCC (2020) emphasises the importance of listening to exactly what the child says, not reacting or expressing any emotion, reassuring them that they are correct in speaking up, and that it is not their fault, and explaining to them that help from the right people will be initiated. Similar recommendations can be seen in the Senedd Safeguarding Guidance (2018), where it

highlights the importance for the practitioner to listen carefully and record accurately without prompt. There is also particular focus on how practitioners should not act in disbelief, jump to conclusions or make any promises that cannot be kept.

### Reporting and referral

Estyn (2023) state that children and young people's needs, and wellbeing should be prioritised over all others, and any safeguarding reports should be referred immediately to the designated safeguarding officer of the setting immediately. This is supported by NSPCC (2024) who state that you should act upon instinct and report concerns of harm or neglect promptly and without delay. Safeguarding Procedures (2019) sets out the process that needs to be followed when dealing with a safeguarding concern. This entails the initial reporting to a safeguarding hub, who have 24 hours to decide on the necessary action. If potential harm is identified, a strategy meeting is held to decide if Section 47 enquiries need to be initiated. The section 47 enquiry will gather all information from multi-agency professionals to determine if there is a risk of significant harm to the child.

When escalating a matter such as in case study two, Pengelly (2016) claims that there are no definitive criteria to identify 'significant harm of a child' however Section 31 of the Children's Act 2004 states that significant harm can be determined by the child's individual health and developmental factors. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) sets out the process of reporting and referring. Each individual setting will have its own policy on child protection and staff should be familiar with the process which details safeguarding procedures and outlines its commitment to support the best interests of the child, and comply with GDPR requirements (St John Lloyd, 2023).

With all school practitioners, there is an obligation, as set out in the school safeguarding policy to report this matter to the sitting designated safeguarding officer, and Welsh Government (2019) highlights the importance of sharing information and how it should be shared to appropriate agencies and authorities. Powell and Uppal (2012) explain the importance of discussing these concerns with a senior peer within the setting and the obligations to inform the child, of the duty to share this information with key other individuals.

As seen in the Assessment Framework (Department for Health, 2000), a range of evidence can be gathered in several ways for example research, interviews, personal records and observation. In addition to these, theoretical concepts can be implemented in professional practice and used as evidence when analysing information (Hughes and Owen, 2009). Lindon and Webb (2016) indicate the need to have all information on the child and family prepared and recorded in a clear manner during the referral process. In addition to this internal process, once it has been noted that there is a potential safeguarding concern the Local Children's Services Department must be

informed. They have a legal empowerment and are obligated to operate as a primary hub for all safeguarding activity. During this stage, inter-agency and multi-agency workers come together to have discussions and decisions are made regarding a plan and next steps (Pengelly, 2016). During these meetings, decisions are made on the best method of safeguarding the child, ensuring that unbiased and fair decisions are made and agreed upon by all stakeholders (Brown et al. 2012).

Trodd and Chivers (2011) however, highlight a controversial issue, of substandard levels of communication across multi-agencies, and to achieve holistic outcomes there needs to be a consistent and transparent attitude towards procedural frameworks from all agencies. Under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, a child who is regarded as being in need, is vulnerable, and unlikely to achieve or maintain a satisfactory degree of health, or it may suffer without multi-agency intervention and support (legislation.gov.uk).

Landmark transformations of how multi-agency services operate have been put in place, following Lord Lamings inquiry of the death of Victoria Climbié, who sadly died because of communicative failures across multiple agencies (Blatchford et al. 2007). Safeguarding Procedures (2019) indicates that if a child is determined to be at risk of significant harm, a child protection conference must be conducted within 15 days of the strategy discussion meeting taking place. The McManus et al. (2022) report reinforces the message that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility but is heavily reliant upon effective multi-agencies working together between sectors and is subject to the efficiency of practitioners fulfilling their safeguarding responsibilities through structures and processes. Most recently, during the first King's speech, pledges have been put in place for the planned child welfare Bill to reinforce safeguarding provisions, and child protection across multi-agencies, this has been endorsed by the Children's Charities Coalition (NSPCC - Children's Charities Coalition, 2024).

### Setting Responsibilities

All school settings in Wales have a legal obligation to safeguard children from neglect, harm and abuse. Welsh Government (n.d.) have set out strict guidance in the Keeping Learners Safe publication, which states that all schools must read and adhere to. It emphasises that each setting must have a holistic, open and effective approach to safeguarding of children. It continues that there should be a designated safeguarding person whom all staff are made aware of. In addition to this, all settings must minimise the risks to children, and act efficiently and appropriately towards the children's best interests always. Furthermore, there should be internal settings policies and procedures that are developed in line with national and local frameworks. Settings also have a responsibility to adhere to strict data protection legislation as set out in the Data Protection Act (2018) however, when there is a safeguarding concern, this is overruled

and sharing of information is required by settings when deemed to be necessary, justified and proportionate.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Wales Act (2015) primarily split into two key areas, wellbeing goals emphasising the seven core areas that public bodies should focus on achieving, and the five ways of working, placing a duty on schools and other public establishments to act in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. Long term integration and collaboration link closely with prevention in this act, and it recognises that many welfare concerns are complex, requiring the responsibility of more than one agency to have the ability to work together to achieve the national strategy of 'Prosperity for All'.

Unicef (2016) works closely with school settings to promote and embed a safe and inspiring environment to be educated in, where talent is encouraged, children are aware of their rights, who are always respected by others and each individual child can flourish. The Department for Education (2022) are working closely with the United Nations to safeguard children's rights. Several measures have been put in place to promote the rights of the child including listening to children and ensuring all children are treated fairly. In addition, UK Government (2022) have published a child friendly breakdown to explain these rights to children. This article explains what is being done to protect children from harm by putting new laws in place, and how to help children who live in poverty by working on employment targets and providing benefits to those in need. The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011, details how children's rights are mandated through Welsh law highlighting its commitment to the UNCRC and the responsibilities school settings must follow. In support, Welsh Government (2022) underline the responsibility of practitioners to uphold and promote the UNCRC. NSPCC (2024) launched a pilot scheme which forms part of the Together for Childhood Programme, the analysis of this trial concluded how important school settings are to build relationships with all agencies and performing early intervention techniques to detect harm or neglect.

The contents of this portfolio have explored some of the processes surrounding safeguarding children, from setting responsibilities to the referral process. It has unpacked the importance for practitioners to identify early and report, any potential safeguarding issues, which have been linked to 6 year old Ben from case study two. It has detailed the current drive and commitment from the Welsh Government to safeguard children and has highlighted the importance of bringing together multi-agencies to strengthen the network to safeguard children. Finally, it has explored some of the many skills required and protocols that should be followed, in recognising, recording, reporting and referring, in suspected cases of harm or neglect.

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