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APPENDIX A:

The role of the Designated Safeguarding Lead

1 MANAGING REFERRALS:

- 1.1 Refer all safeguarding cases, including Early Help, to I-ART as well as to the Police if a crime may have been committed. Cheshire – i-ART@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk. KCSIE 2026 requires DSLs to ensure referrals include contextual safeguarding information, online safety concerns (including AI-generated harm), mental health indicators, and any exploitation risks.
- 1.2 Identify any safeguarding issues relating to individual children, especially ongoing enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989. KCSIE 2026 emphasises identifying risks linked to modern slavery, financial exploitation, misogyny/incel influence, harmful sexual behaviour, and domestic abuse indicators.
- 1.3 Act as a source of support, advice and expertise to staff members on matters of child protection and safeguarding, including Contextual Safeguarding .DSLs will also support staff in recognising online drug markets, digital coercion, AI-generated sexual imagery, and emerging online risks highlighted in KCSIE 2026
- 1.4 Escalate inter-agency concerns and disagreements about a child’s wellbeing. Further information can be found here for Cheshire: i-ART@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk. KCSIE 2026 reinforces that escalation must occur immediately when thresholds are disputed, including concerns relating to attendance, exploitation, online harm, or mental health crisis.
- 1.5 Have responsibility to ensure there is at least one key adult for ‘Operation Encompass*’ and the point of contact for Child Exploitation. *Guiding principles of the scheme are here <https://www.operationencompass.org/centre-participation>. An annual information letter to be sent to parents. All downloadable documents are here: OE - Resources for centre. A generic safeguarding email address has been sent to Operation Encompass to ensure continuity. A key worker completes the online key adult training annually. Further information on Operation Encompass can be found here: OE Information

KCSIE 2026 requires DSLs to ensure Operation Encompass notifications are reviewed daily and trauma-informed responses are implemented for children experiencing domestic abuse. DSLs will ensure exploitation concerns include online grooming, AI-enabled harm, and digital coercion.

- 1.6 To ensure that the Local Authority are notified if children are persistently absent or missing from education. Including children who are 'absent' from education, particularly on repeat occasions or for prolonged periods. Or those 'unexplainable and or/persistent absences from education'. In Line with KCSIE 2026 expectations around attendance DSLs will consider persistent absence as a safeguarding concern linked to exploitation, mental health, domestic abuse, or online harm. Cheshire West & Chester CME procedures require immediate escalation when a child's whereabouts cannot be confirmed, including joint enquiries before removal from roll.

2 RECORD KEEPING:

- 2.1 Keep written (or online) records of Safeguarding and welfare concerns and ensure a stand-alone file is created as necessary for children with safeguarding concerns KCSIE 2026 requires records to clearly distinguish between fact, opinion, and professional judgement, and to include the child's voice verbatim wherever possible. Records must also capture contextual safeguarding factors, online safety concerns (including AI-generated harm), and mental health indicators.
- 2.2 The centre should have at least two emergency contacts for every child in the centre in case of emergencies, and in case there are welfare concerns at the home. KCSIE 2026 recommends additional emergency contacts for vulnerable pupils, including CLA, CIN, CP, and those with persistent absence or exploitation risks.
- 2.3 Maintain a chronology of significant incidents for each child with safeguarding concerns, including a record of decisions made and the reasons for those decisions. Chronologies will include attendance patterns, online behaviour concerns, exploitation indicators, and any escalation decisions (KCSIE 2026). Cheshire West & Chester SCB require chronologies to support multi-agency decision-making and early help pathways.
- 2.4 Ensure such records are kept confidentially and securely and separate from the learners educational record. KCSIE 2026 emphasises secure digital storage, restricted access, and ensuring safeguarding files are never stored within general pupil records. Records must reflect updated data protection expectations, including secure transfer and audit trails.
- 2.5 Where learners leave the centre, the designated safeguarding lead should ensure their child protection file is transferred to the newsetting as soon as possible, and within 5 days for an in-year transfer or within the first 5 days of the start of a new

term to allow the new setting to have support in place for when the learner arrives. The designated safeguarding lead should ensure secure transit, and confirmation of receipt should be obtained. For centres, this should be transferred separately from the main pupil file. Receiving this should ensure key staff such as designated safeguarding leads and special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCO's) or the named persons with oversight for special educational needs and disability (SEND) in a college, are aware as required.

KCSIE 2026 requires DSLs to include contextual safeguarding information, online safety concerns, exploitation risks, and mental health indicators within transferred files. Files must include attendance concerns, CME enquiries, and Operation Encompass notifications. Cheshire West & Chester SCB require safeguarding files to be transferred securely using agreed local protocols, with confirmation of receipt and follow-up if not acknowledged.

3 INTER-AGENCY WORKING AND INFORMATION SHARING:

- 3.1 Co-operate and comply with Children's Social Care for enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989. KCSIE 2026 emphasises that cooperation must include sharing contextual safeguarding information, online harm indicators, exploitation risks, and mental health concerns to support statutory assessments.
- 3.2 Advocate that the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR do not prevent, or limit, the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe; and this includes allowing practitioners to share information without consent (Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025). KCSIE 2026 reinforces that information can be shared without consent where a child is at risk of significant harm, including risks relating to domestic abuse, exploitation, online harm (including AI-generated imagery), and persistent absence. DSLs must ensure staff understand that fears about data protection must never delay safeguarding action.
- 3.3 Complete reports and attend, or ensure other relevant staff members attend, child protection conferences, core group meetings and other multi-agency meetings, as required. KCSIE 2026 requires staff attending multi-agency meetings to be fully prepared, bringing chronologies, attendance data, online safety concerns, and contextual safeguarding information.
We will comply with Cheshire West & Chester SCB expectations to contribute actively to multi-agency plans and provide timely updates.
- 3.4 Liaise with other agencies working with the child, share information as appropriate and contribute to assessments. KCSIE 2026 emphasises liaison with agencies involved

in mental health, early help, domestic abuse, exploitation, and online safety. DSLs will ensure information shared includes emerging risks such as misogyny/incel influence, modern slavery, financial exploitation, and harmful sexual behaviour.

- 3.5 The centres information sharing policy is located on the Google Drive and refers to confidentiality in line with 'Information sharing: advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services' (DfE, 2018). In line with KCSIE 2026 we will ensure information sharing policies reflect updated expectations around digital safeguarding, including filtering and monitoring concerns, AI-enabled harm, and online exploitation. Cheshire West & Chester SCB require centres to follow local information-sharing protocols, including timely sharing of CME concerns, Operation Encompass notifications, and early help indicators.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721581/Information_sharing_advice_practitioners_safeguarding_services.pdf

4 TRAINING:

- 4.1 Undertake appropriate annual training, (updated every two years for DSL's), in order to

- be able to recognise signs of abuse and how to respond to them, including special circumstances such as child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, fabricated or induced illness -KCSIE 2026 requires staff to recognise emerging risks including misogyny/incel influence, modern slavery, financial exploitation, child-to-parent abuse, and AI-enabled online harm (deepfakes, nudification apps).
- understand the assessment process for providing early help and intervention, e.g. thresholds of need, preventative education and the local offer Training must include strengthened early help expectations under KCSIE 2026, including early identification of attendance concerns, online harm, domestic abuse, and contextual safeguarding factors.
- have a working knowledge of how the local authority conducts initial and review child protection (CP) case conferences and contribute effectively to these; Staff must be trained to bring contextual safeguarding information, online safety concerns, mental health indicators, and exploitation risks to multi-agency meetings (KCSIE 2026). and
- be alert to the specific needs of children in need (as specified in section 17 of the Children Act 1989), those with special educational needs, pregnant teenagers, young

carers, those who are privately fostered, vulnerable to exploitation, racialisation and subject to listening or hearing to domestic abuse. KCSIE 2026 adds specific vulnerabilities for gender-questioning pupils, LGBT pupils, children with medical conditions, and children experiencing mental health crisis or suicidal ideation.

- 4.2 Ensure each member of staff has read and understands the centre's Child Protection -Safeguarding policy and procedures, including providing induction on these matters to new staff members. Induction and training must include the centres behaviour policy and the centres procedures for managing children who are missing education, or 'unexplainable and or/persistent absences from education' as well as the staff code of conduct, and the child protection policy, dealing with disclosures and managing allegations processes. KCSIE 2026 requires induction to include online safety (including AI-generated harm), filtering and monitoring systems, low-level concerns, domestic abuse indicators, and contextual safeguarding. Staff to understand strengthened CME protocols under Cheshire West & Chester SCB.

- 4.3 Organise face-to-face whole-company Safeguarding training for all staff members at least every three years.
Ensure staff members who miss the training receive it by other means, e.g. by joining another training. The DSL must provide all staff members with safeguarding updates (for example, via email, e-bulletins and staff meetings), as required, but at least annually, to provide them with relevant skills and knowledge to safeguard children effectively. The Link to access safeguarding training
Is <https://www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk/training/>

KCSIE 2026 requires annual updates to include online harm, exploitation trends, domestic abuse learning, mental health crisis indicators, and contextual safeguarding developments. DSLs will ensure staff receive updates on filtering and monitoring reviews (mandatory annual requirement).

- 4.4 All staff should be aware of systems within their setting which support safeguarding, and these should be explained to them as part of staff induction. This should include the:
- child protection - safeguarding policy
 - behaviour policy
 - staff behaviour policy (sometimes called a code of conduct)
 - safeguarding response to children who go missing from education; and
 - role of the designated safeguarding lead (including the identity of the designated safeguarding lead and any deputies).

Best practice would also see staff and leaders reading - '**What to do if you're worried a child is being abused**', as it contains examples of the different types of safeguarding issues.

KCSIE 2026 requires staff to understand digital safeguarding systems, including filtering and monitoring, reporting online harm, and recognising AI-generated risks.

Staff must be aware of strengthened expectations around attendance monitoring, CME escalation, and Operation Encompass notifications.

- 4.5 Ensure the centre allocates time and resources every year for relevant staff members to attend training and receive continuous professional development opportunities. KCSIE 2026 emphasises CPD on mental health, suicide prevention, exploitation, online harm, domestic abuse, and contextual safeguarding.
- 4.6 Encourage a culture of listening to learner and taking account of their wishes and feelings in any action the centre takes to protect them. KCSIE 2026 requires staff to capture the child's voice verbatim in records and consider lived experience, trauma responses, and communication needs (including SEND and neurodiversity).
- 4.7 Maintain accurate records of staff recruitment, induction, ongoing training and continual professional development (CPD) relating to safeguarding. KCSIE 2026 requires training records to include dates, content covered, confirmation of understanding, and evidence of updates relating to online safety, filtering and monitoring, and emerging risks.

Cheshire:

<https://www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk/training/>

5 AWARENESS RAISING:

- 5.1 Ensure the centre's child protection policies are known, understood and used appropriately. KCSIE 2026 requires staff to understand strengthened expectations around online safety (including AI-generated harm), contextual safeguarding, domestic abuse indicators, mental health crisis signs, and exploitation risks. Policies must be accessible in formats suitable for SEND and EAL staff.
- 5.2 Ensure the centre's Child Protection - Safeguarding policy is reviewed annually (as a minimum) and the procedures and implementation are updated and reviewed regularly, and work with governing bodies or proprietors regarding this. KCSIE 2026

requires immediate updates when new statutory guidance is released, when learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) emerges, or when local authority procedures change. Policies must reflect strengthened CME (Children Missing Education) expectations and annual filtering & monitoring review requirements.

- 5.3 Ensure the Child Protection - Safeguarding policy is available publicly and parents are aware of the fact that referrals about suspected abuse or neglect may be made and the role of the centre in this; KCSIE 2026 requires the setting to inform parents about online safety risks, including AI-generated sexual imagery, digital coercion, and exploitation through social media.

Parents must also be made aware of Operation Encompass, early help pathways, and strengthened attendance safeguarding duties.

- 5.4 Link with the safeguarding partner arrangements to make sure staff are aware of any training opportunities and the latest local policies on local safeguarding arrangements. Cheshire: <https://www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk/training/>. KCSIE 2026 requires DSLs to ensure staff receive updates on emerging risks such as misogyny/incel influence, modern slavery, financial exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour, domestic abuse, and mental health crisis indicators.

6 QUALITY ASSURANCE:

- 6.1 Monitor the implementation of and compliance with policy and procedures, including periodic audits of Safeguarding and welfare concerns files (at a minimum once a year). KCSIE 2026 requires audits to include scrutiny of online safety arrangements (including filtering and monitoring), contextual safeguarding practice, mental health indicators, domestic abuse responses, and exploitation risks. Audits must also review the quality of record-keeping, ensuring fact/opinion distinction, child's voice, and chronology accuracy.
- 6.2 KCSIE 2026 emphasises that Section 175/157 audits must include early help practice, CME (Children Missing Education) compliance, attendance monitoring, alternative provision oversight, and Operation Encompass processes. Chester SCB requires centres to embed learning from CSPRs, Rapid Reviews, and local safeguarding reviews into audit cycles.

- 6.3 Provide regular reports, to the governing body detailing changes and reviews to policy, training undertaken by staff members and the number of learners with child protection plans and other relevant data. KCSIE 2026 requires governing body reports to include online safety data (filtering and monitoring review outcomes), attendance patterns, CME escalations, exploitation trends, mental health concerns, and analysis of low-level concerns.
- 6.4 Take lead responsibility for remedying any deficiencies and weaknesses identified in Safeguarding arrangements. KCSIE 2026 requires DSLs to ensure improvements are implemented promptly and monitored for impact, including strengthened online safety systems, improved attendance safeguarding processes, enhanced staff training, and updated multi-agency working practices.

7 SUPERVISION AND REFLECTION:

- 7.1 Working to ensure learners and young people are protected from harm requires sound professionals' judgements to be made. It is demanding work that can be distressing and stressful. It is therefore essential that staff involved in this work have access to advice and a robust process of reflection/supervision to help them reflect upon and review their work. KCSIE 2026 emphasises the importance of reflective practice for staff managing complex safeguarding issues, including exploitation, domestic abuse, online harm (AI-generated imagery, digital coercion), mental health crisis indicators, and harmful sexual behaviour. Supervision must support staff in recognising the emotional impact of safeguarding work and promote trauma-informed responses.
- 7.2 The centre will have a framework for providing an opportunity to staff who are working directly with vulnerable young people, particularly those who are being managed on a child protection, child in need or team around the family plan, to have regular access to an appropriate manager to talk through and reflect on their involvement with the child's case. A guidance document published by tCheshire: <https://www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk/professionals/>

KCSIE 2026 requires supervision to include discussion of contextual safeguarding factors, attendance concerns, CME escalation, exploitation indicators, and online safety risks. Supervision should ensure staff are confident in recognising misogyny/incel influence, modern slavery, financial exploitation, domestic abuse patterns, and mental health vulnerabilities. Cheshire West & Chester SCB expect supervision to support staff in applying learning from CSPRs, Rapid Reviews, and local safeguarding audits.

APPENDIX B:

Safeguarding Procedure

1 DEFINITIONS:

- 1.1 **Abuse:** a form of maltreatment of a learner. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Harm can include ill treatment that is not physical as well as the impact of witnessing ill treatment of others. This can be particularly relevant, for example, in relation to the impact on children of all forms of domestic abuse, including where they see, hear or experience its effects. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults or by another child or children.

KCSIE 2026 expands online abuse definitions to include AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfakes, nudification apps, digital coercion, and exploitation through social media and encrypted platforms. • Abuse may include misogyny/incel-related harm, financial exploitation, modern slavery indicators, and harmful sexual behaviour linked to online content.

- 1.2 **Children** are any people who have not yet reached their 18th birthday; a 16-year-old, whether living independently, in further education, in the armed forces or in hospital, is a child and is entitled to the same protection and services as anyone younger. KCSIE now applies to providers of post 16 education as set out Education

and Training (Welfare of Children) Act 2021 KCSIE 2026 reinforces that safeguarding responsibilities extend to all post-16 providers, including apprenticeships, traineeships, and alternative provision.

1.3 **Child protection** is part of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and refers to activity undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, or significant harm is suggested. KCSIE 2026 emphasises that child protection includes risks relating to online harm, exploitation, domestic abuse, mental health crisis, and harmful sexual behaviour.

1.4 **Early help** means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life KCSIE 2026 strengthens early help expectations, including early identification of attendance concerns, online harm, domestic abuse, exploitation, and contextual safeguarding factors.

Chester SCB require centres to follow updated Early Help pathways and escalate promptly when concerns emerge.

1.5 **Harm** is ill treatment or impairment of health and development, including impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another. KCSIE 2026 includes harm caused by exposure to misogyny/incel content, online radicalisation, coercive control, and AI-enabled sexual harm.

1.6 **Safeguarding children** is the action we take to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. **Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children** is defined as:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing the impairment of children's mental and physical health or development
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

Centre staff are particularly important, as they are in a position to identify concerns early, provide help for children, promote children's welfare and prevent concerns from escalating (KCSIE 2025) KCSIE 2026 adds strengthened expectations around mental health, suicide risk, domestic abuse indicators, online harm, exploitation, and contextual safeguarding.

All staff must be aware safeguarding issues can manifest themselves via child-on-child abuse. This is most likely to include but not limited to: bullying (including cyber bullying), gender-based violence/sexual assaults, harassment and sexting. Staff should be clear as to the centre or college's policy and procedures with regards to child-on-child abuse; and on how the risk of child-on-child abuse is being minimised, how suspected abuse will be recorded and investigated; as well as how the victims and perpetrators will be supported.

More support can be found:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-advice-for-education-settings-working-with-children-and-young-people>

It is important that the centre records incidents across the whole spectrum of sexual violence, sexual harassment, and harmful sexualised behaviours so that they can understand the scale of the problem in their own centres and make appropriate plans to reduce it. For more guidance go to: KCSIE 2026.

All such incidents should be immediately reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or equivalent and managed in line with your setting's child protection policies. Victims of harm should be supported by the centre lead.

A bespoke helpline for children and young people who've experienced abuse at centre, and for worried adults and professionals that need support and guidance. If you are concerned about something, you can contact the NSPCC helpline Report Abuse in Education on 0800 136 663 or [email help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

KCSIE 2026 expands child-on-child abuse to include AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfake sexual content, digital coercion, misogyny/incel influence, and harmful sexual behaviour linked to online platforms. centres must record all incidents, including low-level concerns, to identify patterns and respond proactively.

1.7 Significant harm is the threshold that justifies compulsory intervention in the family in the best interests of the child. Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 states 'where the question of whether harm suffered by a child is significant turns on the child's health or development, his health or development shall be compared with that which could reasonably be expected of a similar child.' KCSIE 2026 emphasises that significant harm may include online harm, exploitation, domestic abuse exposure, mental health crisis, and harmful sexual behaviour.

1.8 Early help - Any child may benefit from early help, but all centre staff should be particularly alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:

- is disabled or has certain health conditions and has specific additional needs

- has special educational needs (whether or not they have a statutory Education, Health and Care plan)
- has a mental health need
- is a young carer
- is showing signs of being drawn in to anti-social or criminal behaviour, including gang involvement and association with organised crime groups or county lines
- is frequently missing/goes missing from education, home or care,
- has experienced multiple suspensions, is at risk of being permanently excluded from centres, colleges and in Alternative Provision or a Pupil Referral Unit.
- is at risk of modern slavery, trafficking, sexual and/or criminal exploitation
- is at risk of being radicalised or exploited
- has a parent or carer in custody, or is affected by parental offending
- is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as drug and alcohol misuse, adult mental health issues and domestic abuse
- is misusing alcohol and other drugs themselves
- is at risk of so-called 'honour'-based abuse such as Female Genital Mutilation or Forced Marriage
- is a privately fostered child.

KCSIE 2026 adds additional early help indicators including: –

- persistent absence or unexplained absence patterns
- exposure to misogyny/incel content
- online harm including AI-generated sexual imagery
- financial exploitation – harmful sexual behaviour
- children with medical conditions
- gender-questioning or LGBT pupils facing additional vulnerabilities.

2 CATEGORIES OF ABUSE:

2.1 Emotional abuse: the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person.

- It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning or preventing the child from participating in normal social interaction.
- It may involve seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children.

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

KCSIE 2026 expands emotional abuse to include exposure to misogyny/incel content, online radicalisation, digital coercion, AI-generated sexual imagery, and harmful online communities.

Emotional abuse may include coercive control, persistent humiliation online, and manipulation through digital platforms.

2.2 Neglect: 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, for example, as a result of maternal substance abuse.

Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer 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 caregivers);
- or ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

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

Educational neglect is also considered:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/neglect/>.

Neglect is the most common reason for a child to be the subject of a child Protection Plan in the UK and research from the NSPCC tells us that 1 in 7 secondary centre age children and 1 in 20 children under 11 in the UK have been neglected at some point.

KCSIE 2026 highlights digital neglect, including lack of supervision online, exposure to harmful content, and failure to protect children from online exploitation. Neglect may include failure to support a child's mental health needs, failure to ensure centre attendance, and failure to respond to persistent absence (CME). Cheshire West & Chester SCB emphasises early identification of neglect through multi-agency chronologies and early help pathways.

2.3 Physical abuse: a form of abuse which 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 or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

KCSIE 2026 includes physical harm linked to modern slavery, forced criminality, and exploitation (including county lines). Physical abuse may also occur through coercive control, restraint, or violence linked to domestic abuse.

2.4 Sexual abuse: involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children. The sexual abuse of children by other children is a specific safeguarding issue in education and all staff should be aware of it and of their centre or college's policy and procedures for dealing with it.

KCSIE 2026 expands sexual abuse definitions to include AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfake sexual content, nudification apps, and digitally manipulated sexual images. Online sexual abuse may include digital coercion, extortion, livestreaming, and exploitation through encrypted platforms. Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) may be influenced by misogyny/incel content, pornography exposure, or online communities.

Cheshire West & Chester SCB require centres to record all sexual incidents, including low-level concerns, to identify patterns and escalate appropriately.

3. Mental Health:

3.1 All staff should also be aware that mental health problems can, in some cases, be an indicator that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering abuse, neglect or exploitation. KCSIE 2026 strengthens this by highlighting mental health concerns linked to online harm (including AI-generated sexual imagery), digital coercion, misogyny/incel influence, domestic abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, and exploitation. Staff must recognise mental health deterioration linked to persistent absence, bullying, online harassment, and contextual safeguarding factors.

3.2 Only appropriately trained professionals should attempt to make a diagnosis of a mental health problem. Staff however, are well placed to observe children day-to-day and identify those whose behaviour suggests that they may be experiencing a mental health problem or be at risk of developing one. KCSIE 2026 emphasises that staff

should monitor changes in presentation, including withdrawal, agitation, emotional dysregulation, self-harm indicators, or sudden shifts in online behaviour.

Staff must record concerns clearly, including the child's voice, and escalate promptly.

3.3 Where children have suffered abuse and neglect, or other potentially traumatic adverse childhood experiences, this can have a lasting impact throughout childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. It is key that staff are aware of how these children's experiences, can impact on their mental health, behaviour and education. KCSIE 2026 highlights trauma responses linked to domestic abuse, coercive control, exploitation, online harm, and harmful sexual behaviour. Staff must understand how trauma affects attendance, concentration, emotional regulation, and relationships.

3.4 If staff have a mental health concern about a child that is also a safeguarding concern, immediate action should be taken, following their child protection policy and speaking to the designated safeguarding lead or a deputy.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-children-and-young-peoples-emotional-health-and-wellbeing> KCSIE 2026 requires immediate escalation of concerns relating to suicidal ideation, self-harm, digital self-harm, or exposure to harmful online content.

DSLs must ensure mental health concerns are included in referrals to Early Help, IFD, or I-ART.

The department has published advice and guidance on Preventing and Tackling Bullying, and Mental Health and Behaviour in centres (which may also be useful for colleges). In addition, Public Health England has produced a range of resources to support secondary centre teachers to promote positive health, wellbeing and resilience among young people including its guidance Promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing. Its resources include social media, forming positive relationships, smoking and alcohol. See Every Mind Matters for links to all materials and lesson plans. KCSIE 2026 requires centres to address online bullying, digital coercion, AI-generated harm, and misogyny/incel content as part of mental health education.

There are three thresholds for and types of referrals that need to be considered:

Is this a child with additional needs; where their health, development or achievement may be adversely affected?

- Age-appropriate progress is not being made, and the causes are unclear or
- The support of more than one agency is needed to meet the child or young person's needs.

If this is a child with additional needs discuss the issues with the Early Help Assessment (EHAT) trained practitioner in your centre, the child and parents. You will need to obtain parental consent for an EHAT to be completed. KCSIE 2026 adds early help indicators including online harm, persistent absence, exposure to misogyny/incel content, harmful sexual behaviour, and mental health crisis signs.

Is this a child in need matter? Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 says:

- they are unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development, without the provision of services by a local authority.
- their health or development is likely to be impaired, or further impaired without the provision of such services.
- they are SEND (and as such can face additional safeguarding challenges).

If this is a child in need, discuss the issues with the Designated Safeguarding Lead and parents. Obtain their consent for referral.

KCSIE 2026 emphasises mental health needs, digital harm, exploitation, and domestic abuse as key Section 17 indicators.

Is this a child protection matter? Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 says:

- children at risk or who are suffering significant harm.
- children suffering the effects of significant harm
- serious health problems.

Cheshire:

<https://www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk/professionals/continuum-of-need/threshold-for-social-care/>

If this is a child protection matter, this should be discussed with the Designated Safeguarding Lead and will need to be referred to the Integrated Front Door by the centre as soon as possible.

Cheshire:

<https://www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk/professionals/>

KCSIE 2026 requires Section 47 referrals to include mental health crisis indicators, suicidal ideation, digital self-harm, exploitation risks, and online harm. DSLs to ensure concerns relating to persistent absence, domestic abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, and contextual safeguarding are included in referrals.

APPENDIX C: FURTHER INFORMATION

1 Female Genital Mutilation - Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs. It is illegal in the UK and a form of child abuse with long-lasting harmful consequences. Professionals in all agencies, and individuals and groups in relevant communities, need to be alert to the possibility of a girl being at risk of FGM, or already having suffered FGM.

- Staff should be aware that emerging online harms (AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfakes, nudification apps) may be used to coerce, threaten, or shame girls, increasing vulnerability to harmful practices including FGM.
- KCSIE 2026 highlights the need for staff to understand how misogyny, incel-linked ideology, extremist influence, and cultural coercion can contribute to environments where FGM is normalised or encouraged.
- DSLs should ensure staff access updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB briefings on harmful practices, exploitation, CME, early help pathways, and Operation Encompass, as girls at risk of FGM may also present with patterns of absence or sudden withdrawal from centre.
- Staff should consider contextual safeguarding factors such as peer influence, extended family pressure, community norms, and online spaces where harmful practices may be promoted.

1.1 Indicators - There is a range of potential indicators that a girl may be at risk of FGM. Warning signs that FGM may be about to take place, or may have already taken place, can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-statutory-guidance-on-female-genital-mutilation>

The FGM resource pack for agencies can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-genital-mutilation-resource-pack/female-genital-mutilation-resource-pack>

Staff should also consider digital indicators, including involvement in online groups promoting harmful cultural practices, exposure to coercive digital content, or use of encrypted messaging platforms linked to FGM planning.

KCSIE 2026 requires staff to recognise that online misogyny, extremist influence, and digital coercion may increase risk factors or mask early warning signs.

Patterns of CME (Children Missing Education) or unexplained absences should be treated as potential indicators, in line with Cheshire West & Chester guidance.

1.2 Actions - If staff have a concern, they should activate local safeguarding procedures, using existing national and local protocols for multi-agency liaison with police and children's social care. Mandatory reporting commenced in October 2015. These procedures remain when dealing with concerns regarding the potential for FGM to take place. Where a teacher discovers that an act of FGM appears to have been carried out on a girl who is aged under 18, there is a statutory duty upon that individual to report it to the police.

Staff should also report concerns where digital coercion, online threats, or AI-generated sexual imagery appear linked to FGM risk, in line with KCSIE 2026 emerging harms guidance.

DSLs will ensure staff know how to access updated local pathways for early help, exploitation, and harmful practices through Cheshire West & Chester SCB. Concerns involving domestic abuse should be cross-referenced with Operation Encompass processes, as domestic abuse can increase vulnerability to FGM.

1.3 Mandatory Reporting Duty

Section 5B of the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 (as inserted by section 74 of the Serious Crime Act 2015) will place a statutory duty upon **teachers, along with social workers and healthcare professionals, to report to the police** where they discover (either through disclosure by the victim or visual evidence) that FGM appears to have been carried out on a girl under 18. Those failing to report such cases will face disciplinary sanctions. It will be rare for teachers to see visual evidence, and they should not be examining pupils, but the same definition of what is meant by "to discover that an act of FGM appears to have been carried out" is used for all professionals to whom this mandatory reporting duty applies. The

Mandatory reporting duty commenced in October 2015. Teachers must report to the police cases where they discover that an act of FGM appears to have been carried out. Unless the teacher has a good reason not to, they should still consider and discuss any such case with the centre's designated safeguarding lead and involve the Integrated Front Door as appropriate.

Staff should be aware that disclosures may now occur through digital means (e.g., messages, images, AI-generated content), and these must be treated with the same seriousness as verbal disclosures.

KCSIE 2026 emphasises that staff must understand how emerging technologies can facilitate or conceal harmful practices, and disclosures involving digital coercion or online threats should be reported immediately.

DSLs will ensure staff are aware of updated local reporting routes, including Cheshire West & Chester I-ART, particularly where concerns overlap with exploitation, domestic abuse, or CME.

2 Fabricated or Induced Illness / Perplexing Presentation:

2.1 Staff must be aware of the risk of children being abused through fabricated or induced illness (FII). There are three main ways of the carer fabricating or inducing illness in a child. These are not mutually exclusive and include:

- fabrication of signs and symptoms. This may include fabrication of past medical history;
- fabrication of signs and symptoms and falsification of hospital charts and records, and specimens of bodily fluids. This may also include falsification of letters and documents.
- induction of illness by a variety of means.

Staff should be aware that emerging online harms (AI-generated medical documents, falsified digital records, deepfake communications) may be used to support fabricated illness narratives.

KCSIE 2026 highlights the need for staff to recognise digital coercion, online manipulation, and technology-enabled falsification as potential components of FII.

DSLs should ensure staff understand contextual safeguarding factors, including parental mental health, domestic abuse, coercive control, and financial exploitation, all of which may contribute to perplexing presentations.

Staff should remain alert to patterns of Children Missing Education (CME), repeated medical appointments, or sudden withdrawal from centre, in line with Cheshire West & Chester SCB guidance.

- 2.2 Where this is identified and considered a risk a referral will be made in Cheshire to I-ART for support and guidance. centre may involve other agencies in making their assessments. That could include centre nurse, community paediatrician, occupational therapists for example.

Staff should consider whether digital evidence (messages, online groups, falsified medical information, AI-generated content) forms part of the concern and ensure this is shared with I-ART as appropriate.

KCSIE 2026 requires staff to understand emerging risks such as online medical misinformation, digital coercion, and technology-enabled fabrication when making referrals.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated local briefings on exploitation, early help pathways, CME, and Operation Encompass, as FII may co-exist with domestic abuse, coercive control, or wider safeguarding concerns.

Multi-agency assessments should include consideration of contextual safeguarding, including family dynamics, parental vulnerabilities, and external influences that may contribute to perplexing presentations.

3 Gang and Youth / Serious Violence:

- 3.1 Children and Young People who become involved in Gangs are at risk of violent crime and as a result of this involvement are deemed vulnerable. Agencies and professionals have a responsibility to safeguard these children and young people and to prevent further harm both to the young person and their potential victims. Risks associated with Gang activity include access to weapons (including firearms), retaliatory violence and territorial violence with other gangs, knife crime, sexual violence and substance misuse

Staff should be aware of emerging online harms linked to gang involvement, including digital coercion, AI-generated threats, deepfake videos, nudification apps, and online intimidation used to recruit or control young people.

KCSIE 2026 highlights the influence of misogyny, incel ideology, extremist content, and online radicalisation, all of which can intersect with gang culture and serious youth violence.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB briefings on exploitation, serious violence, early help pathways, and contextual safeguarding.

Staff should consider contextual safeguarding factors such as neighbourhood violence, peer influence, online networks, and community-based risks that may increase vulnerability.

Serious violence may co-exist with other exploitation types, including modern slavery, financial exploitation, and domestic abuse within the family environment.

3.2 **Indicators may be (age in brackets):**

- Troublesome (7-9; 10-12) / High daring (10-12) / Positive attitude towards delinquency (10-12) / Previously committed offences (7-9) / Involved in anti-social behaviour (10-12)
- Substance use (7-9) / Aggression (7-9) / Running away and truancy (7-9; 10-12) / Marijuana use (10- 12) / Marijuana availability (10-12) / Disrupted family (7- 9; 10-12) / Poor supervision (10-12)
- Low academic achievement in primary centre (10- 12) / Learning disability (10-12) / Peers involved in crime and/or anti-social behaviour (7-9; 10-12)
- Children and young people in the neighbourhood involved in crime and/or anti-social behaviour (10-12)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-strategy>

Staff should also consider digital indicators, including involvement in online groups promoting violence, encrypted messaging platforms, or exposure to coercive digital content encouraging gang activity.

KCSIE 2026 requires staff to recognise online misogyny, extremist influence, and harmful sexual behaviour as emerging indicators linked to gang involvement.

Patterns of Children Missing Education (CME), unexplained absences, or sudden changes in behaviour should be treated as potential indicators of exploitation or serious violence.

Staff should be aware that AI-generated content may be used to threaten, shame, or manipulate young people into gang activity or criminal behaviour.

3.3 Children are also increasingly being targeted and recruited online using social media. Children can easily become trapped by this type of exploitation as county lines gangs can manufacture drug debts which need to be worked off or threaten serious violence and kidnap towards victims (and their families) if they attempt to leave the county lines network.

A number of the indicators for CSE and CCE as detailed above may be applicable to where children are involved in county lines. Some additional specific indicators that may be present where a child is criminally exploited through involvement in county lines are children who:

- **go missing and are subsequently found in areas away from their home;**
- **have been the victim or perpetrator of serious violence (e.g. knife crime)**

Staff should be aware that county lines recruitment increasingly uses digital coercion, AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfakes, and online threats to control young people. KCSIE 2026 emphasises the need for staff to understand how online grooming, digital manipulation, and coercive control intersect with criminal exploitation.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated local guidance on exploitation, CME, early help pathways, and Operation Encompass, as county lines involvement often co-exists with domestic abuse, coercive control, and wider contextual safeguarding concerns.

Staff should consider whether financial exploitation, modern slavery, or trafficking indicators are present, as these are increasingly linked to county lines operations.

Online misogyny and harmful sexual behaviour may be used to target girls for sexual exploitation within gang or county lines networks.

4 'Child Abuse Linked to Faith and Belief':

- 4.1 Our policy recognises the 'National Action Plan to Tackle Abuse linked to faith or belief' which describes this abuse as: 'not about challenging people's beliefs, but where beliefs lead to abuse that must not be tolerated. This includes belief in witchcraft, spirit possession, demons or the devil, the evil eye or djinns, dakini, kindoki, ritual or muti murders and use of fear of the supernatural to make children comply with being trafficked for domestic slavery or sexual exploitation. The beliefs which are not confined to one faith, nationality or ethnic community.' Staff should be aware that emerging online harms (AI-generated imagery, deepfakes, nudification apps, and digital manipulation) may be used to reinforce supernatural fear, coercion, or control linked to faith-based abuse.

KCSIE 2026 highlights the influence of online misogyny, incel ideology, extremist content, and digital coercion, all of which can intersect with harmful practices linked to faith or belief.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB briefings on harmful practices, exploitation, CME, early help pathways, and contextual safeguarding.

Staff should consider contextual safeguarding factors such as community norms, peer influence, cultural expectations, and online spaces where harmful beliefs may be promoted or reinforced.

Abuse linked to faith or belief may co-exist with domestic abuse, coercive control, modern slavery, trafficking, or financial exploitation.

- 4.2 When this type of abuse is suspected staff will make a referral will make a referral to I-Art for support and guidance. The centre may request the advice and support of MEAS service in making their assessments. For more information:
<http://nationalfgmcentre.org.uk/calfb/>

Savera UK are a Liverpool based charity which specifically targets Harmful Practices including FGM, Honour Based Abuse and Forced Marriage.
<https://www.saverauk.co.uk/>

Staff should consider whether digital evidence (messages, online groups, AI-generated content, coercive digital threats) forms part of the concern and ensure this is shared with IFD or I-ART as appropriate.

KCSIE 2026 requires staff to understand how online manipulation, digital coercion, and technology-enabled abuse can facilitate or conceal harmful practices linked to faith or belief.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated local guidance on exploitation, CME, early help pathways, and Operation Encompass, as abuse linked to faith or belief may co-exist with domestic abuse or coercive control.

Multi-agency assessments should include contextual safeguarding considerations, including cultural pressures, community influence, extended family involvement, and online networks promoting harmful beliefs.

Staff should be aware that children experiencing abuse linked to faith or belief may also be at risk of honour-based abuse, forced marriage, or harmful sexual behaviour.

5 Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking:

- 5.1 The Modern Slavery Act 2015 is an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. It is designed to combat modern slavery in the UK and consolidates previous offences relating to trafficking and slavery.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/modern-slavery-bill>

The definition of human trafficking is:

- (a) “Trafficking of persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat of or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.
- (b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in sub-paragraph of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used.
- (c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in sub-paragraph (a) of this article. “Child” shall mean any person under eighteen years of age.

Staff should be aware that modern slavery and trafficking increasingly involve digital coercion, including AI-generated threats, deepfake videos, nudification apps, and online blackmail used to recruit or control victims.

KCSIE 2026 highlights the influence of online misogyny, incel ideology, extremist content, and harmful sexual behaviour, all of which can intersect with trafficking and exploitation.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB briefings on exploitation, harmful practices, CME, early help pathways, and contextual safeguarding.

Staff should consider contextual safeguarding factors such as community influence, peer networks, online grooming, domestic abuse, coercive control, and financial exploitation, all of which may contribute to trafficking risk.

Trafficking may co-exist with other exploitation types, including forced labour, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, modern slavery, and organ harvesting.

- 5.2 Children trafficked into the country may be registered at a centre for a term or longer, before being moved to another part of the UK or abroad. This pattern of registration and de-registration may be an indicator that a child has been trafficked. It has been identified as a particular concern in centres which are situated near ports of entry, but practitioners should be alert to this possibility in all centres. However, practitioners should always bear in mind that not all children who go missing from education

have been victims of trafficking. For example, there may be instances of children from communities that move around – Gypsy, Roma, traveller or migrant families – who collectively go missing from centre.

Staff should consider digital indicators such as online recruitment, coercive messaging, encrypted communication platforms, or AI-generated content linked to trafficking networks.

KCSIE 2026 requires staff to recognise that online grooming, digital manipulation, and technology-enabled exploitation are increasingly used to facilitate trafficking.

Patterns of Children Missing Education (CME), sudden centre moves, unexplained absences, or inconsistent attendance should be treated as potential indicators, in line with Cheshire West & Chester guidance.

Staff should be aware that trafficked children may present with multiple vulnerabilities, including domestic abuse, coercive control, financial exploitation, or harmful cultural practices.

DSLs should ensure staff understand local pathways for early help, exploitation, and contextual safeguarding, particularly where concerns overlap with trafficking.

- 5.3 If a member of the centre staff suspects that a learner may have been trafficked they should act immediately to inform the senior member of staff with designated responsibility for child protection and ensure that police or local authority children's social care are contacted immediately. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support.

Staff should be aware that disclosures may occur through digital means (messages, images, AI-generated content, online threats), and these must be treated with the same seriousness as verbal disclosures.

KCSIE 2026 emphasises the need for staff to understand how emerging technologies can facilitate or conceal trafficking, including deepfakes, nudification apps, and coercive digital manipulation.

DSLs should ensure staff know how to access updated local reporting routes, including Cheshire West & Chester I-ART, particularly where concerns overlap with exploitation, domestic abuse, or CME.

Staff should consider whether trafficking concerns intersect with county lines, criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation, modern slavery, or domestic servitude.

Multi-agency responses should include contextual safeguarding considerations such as community influence, peer networks, online recruitment, and family vulnerabilities.

6 Risks Associated with Parent/Carer Mental Health:

- 6.1 The majority of Parents who suffer mental ill-health are able to care for and safeguard their children and/or unborn child. Some parents, however, will be unable to meet the needs and ensure the safety of their children.

The centre will follow the guidance outlined in 'working with parents with mental health problems and their children (Think child, think parent, think family: a guide to parental mental health and child welfare).

Staff should be aware that emerging online harms (AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfakes, nudification apps, digital coercion) may exacerbate parental mental health difficulties and increase safeguarding risks for children.

KCSIE 2026 highlights the need for staff to understand how domestic abuse, coercive control, misogyny/incel influence, and financial exploitation can intersect with parental mental health and impact a child's safety.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB briefings on exploitation, harmful practices, CME, early help pathways, and contextual safeguarding, as parental mental health concerns often co-exist with wider vulnerabilities.

Staff should consider contextual safeguarding factors such as family dynamics, community pressures, online influences, and peer networks that may increase risk when parental mental health is unstable.

Children living with parental mental health difficulties may also be at increased risk of neglect, emotional abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, or exposure to domestic abuse.

- 6.2 Our approach is to recognise; seek support; instil preventive factors and monitor. I-ART in Cheshire can provide links and support with Cheshire Adult Social Care if required. Designated teacher should seek support through TAF with family support but escalate to the Integrated Front Door or I-ART if they are concerned that the child involved is being placed at immediate risk of harm. The offer includes mental health support services for

Cheshire:

<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/residents/health-and-social-care/children-and-young-people/early-help-and-prevention-service>

Staff should consider whether digital evidence (messages, online groups, AI-generated content, coercive digital threats) forms part of the concern and ensure this is shared with IFD or I-ART as appropriate.

KCSIE 2026 requires staff to recognise how online harms, digital manipulation, and technology-enabled abuse can worsen parental mental health and increase risk to children.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated local guidance on exploitation, CME, early help pathways, Operation Encompass, and contextual safeguarding, as parental mental health concerns often overlap with domestic abuse or coercive control. Multi-agency assessments should include consideration of contextual safeguarding, including parental vulnerabilities, community influence, online networks, and peer pressures.

Staff should be aware that parental mental health difficulties may co-exist with substance misuse, financial exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour, or modern slavery indicators, requiring coordinated multi-agency intervention.

7 Drugs and Alcohol:

Children can be at risk of drugs and alcohol directly and indirectly. They may be at direct risk of having access to these substances (see guidance on gangs) or indirectly because they affect family life at home through use by parents/carers, siblings, child-minders etc. Risks associated with drugs and alcohol are built into the year 5-6 curriculum. We work with our partners to provide curriculum advice and guidance in this area.

More details can be found at:

<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/your-council/policies-and-performance/council-plans-policies-and-strategies/health-improvement-strategy/substance-misuse-strategy/our-priorities>

Staff should be aware that emerging online harms (AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfakes, nudification apps, digital coercion) are increasingly linked to substance misuse, either through peer pressure, blackmail, or exploitation.

KCSIE 2026 highlights the influence of misogyny, incel ideology, extremist content, harmful sexual behaviour, and digital manipulation, all of which can intersect with drug and alcohol misuse among children and families.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB briefings on exploitation, CME, early help pathways, and contextual safeguarding, as substance misuse often co-exists with wider vulnerabilities such as domestic abuse, coercive control, and mental health concerns.

Staff should consider contextual safeguarding factors such as peer influence, online networks, community pressures, and family dynamics, which may increase risk of substance misuse.

Children living in households where drugs or alcohol are present may also be at increased risk of neglect, emotional abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, or exposure to domestic abuse, requiring coordinated multi-agency intervention.

Staff should be alert to digital indicators of substance misuse, including online drug sales, encrypted messaging platforms, social media recruitment, and coercive online groups encouraging drug use.

KCSIE 2026 requires centres to ensure staff receive briefings on emerging risks, including online harm, exploitation, modern slavery, financial exploitation, and contextual safeguarding — all of which may intersect with drug and alcohol misuse. Curriculum content should reflect updated local guidance, including Cheshire West & Chester substance misuse strategy priorities, ensuring pupils receive accurate, current, and safeguarding-aligned education.

8 Honour Based Violence and Forced Marriages:

8.1 Honour Based Violence and Forced Marriage refers to a collection of practices used to control behaviour within families to protect perceived cultural or religious beliefs and honour. Violence can occur when offenders perceive that a relative has shamed the family or community by breaking their 'code of honour'. Honour Based Violence cuts across all cultures and communities: Turkish, Kurdish, Afghani, South Asian, African, Middle Eastern, South and Eastern European for example. This is not an exhaustive list. Where a culture is heavily male dominated, HBV may exist.

Staff should be aware that emerging online harms (AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfakes, nudification apps, digital coercion) are increasingly used to shame, threaten, or control victims within HBV contexts.

KCSIE 2026 highlights the influence of online misogyny, incel ideology, extremist content, and harmful sexual behaviour, all of which can intersect with HBV and forced marriage.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB briefings on harmful practices, exploitation, CME, early help pathways, and contextual safeguarding.

Staff should consider contextual safeguarding factors such as community norms, extended family pressure, cultural expectations, peer influence, and online networks that may reinforce HBV.

HBV may co-exist with domestic abuse, coercive control, modern slavery, trafficking, sexual exploitation, or financial exploitation, requiring coordinated multi-agency intervention

8.2 'A forced marriage is a marriage in which one or both spouses do not (or, in the case of some vulnerable adults, cannot) consent to the marriage and duress is involved. Duress can include physical, psychological, financial, sexual and emotional pressure.' The age to marry has been raised to the age of 18. (Feb 2023) It is now a crime to carry out any conduct whose purpose is to cause a child to marry before their 18th Birthday, even if violence, threats, or another form of coercion are not used. As with the existing forced marriage law, this applies to non-binding, unofficial 'marriages' as well as legal marriages. (KCSIE 2025)

For more information see:

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/when-things-go-wrong/forced-marriage/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-right-to-choose-government-guidance-on-forced-marriage>

<http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/>

Staff should be aware that forced marriage coercion increasingly involves digital manipulation, including AI-generated threats, deepfake videos, and online blackmail used to pressure children into compliance.

KCSIE 2026 requires staff to recognise how online grooming, digital coercion, harmful sexual behaviour, and extremist influence can facilitate forced marriage.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated local guidance on exploitation, CME, early help pathways, Operation Encompass, and contextual safeguarding, as forced marriage often overlaps with domestic abuse and coercive control.

Staff should consider whether digital evidence (messages, online groups, coercive content, AI-generated imagery) forms part of the concern and ensure this is shared with Cheshire West & Chester I-ART.

Forced marriage concerns may intersect with HBV, trafficking, modern slavery, sexual exploitation, and financial exploitation, requiring multi-agency coordination.

Staff should be alert to online networks that promote harmful cultural practices or facilitate forced marriage arrangements, including encrypted messaging platforms and social media groups.

9 Managing Allegations against staff:

9.1 The Local Authority Designated Officer for Allegations (LADO**) must be told of **allegations against adults working with children and young people within 24 hours**.**

Chairs of Governors should refer to this guidance if there is an allegation against the headteacher. This includes all cases that meet the harms threshold where a person is alleged to have:

- behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed a child
- possibly committed a criminal offence against, or related to, a child
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children

- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

The last bullet point above includes behaviour that may have happened outside of education, that might make an individual unsuitable to work with children, this is known as transferable risk. Where appropriate an assessment of transferable risk to children with whom the person works should be undertaken. If in doubt seek advice from the local authority designated officer (LADO).

Staff must be aware that emerging online harms (AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfakes, nudification apps, digital coercion) may form part of allegations and must be treated with the same seriousness as offline behaviour.

KCSIE 2026 emphasises that online conduct outside of centre can create *transferable risk* and must be considered when assessing suitability to work with children.

Allegations involving digital communication, social media, or online boundary breaches should be reviewed under both the harms threshold and low-level concerns processes.

DSLs and senior leaders should ensure staff receive updated local briefings from Cheshire West & Chester SCB on managing allegations, transferable risk, and emerging digital risks.

9.2 There are two levels of allegation/concern:

1. Allegations that may meet the harms threshold (see definition above)
2. Allegation/concerns that do not meet the harms threshold – referred to in the guidance as ‘low level concerns’ (KCSIE 2025)

Governing bodies and proprietors should have policies and processes to deal with concerns (including allegations) which do not meet the harm threshold. Concerns may arise in several ways and from a number of sources. For example: suspicion; complaint; or disclosure made by a child, parent or other adult within or outside of the organisation; or as a result of vetting checks undertaken.

It is important that centres and colleges have appropriate policies and processes in place to manage and record any such concerns and take appropriate action to safeguard children.

‘Low Level Concerns’ - Creating a culture in which all concerns about adults (including allegations that do not meet the harms threshold are shared responsibly and with the right person, recorded and dealt with appropriately, is critical.

A low-level concern is any concern – no matter how small, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a ‘nagging doubt’ - that an adult working in or on behalf of the centre or college may have acted in a way that is inconsistent with the staff code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work; and does not meet the allegations threshold or is otherwise not considered serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO. Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:

- being over friendly with children
- having favourites
- taking photographs of children on their mobile phone
- engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door; or,
- 'humiliating pupils'

Such concerns should always be recorded and reviewed so that potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour can be identified.

KCSIE 2026 requires centres to ensure low-level concerns processes explicitly cover online behaviour, including inappropriate digital communication, boundary-crossing on social media, or misuse of technology.

centres must ensure low-level concerns are recorded, reviewed, and analysed for patterns, including repeated digital boundary breaches or emerging online risk indicators.

Staff should be briefed on recognising concerns linked to online misogyny, incel influence, harmful sexual behaviour, digital coercion, and contextual safeguarding, as these may underpin emerging patterns of adult behaviour.

Governing bodies should ensure policies reflect updated local guidance from Cheshire West & Chester SCB, including expectations for digital conduct and reporting.

9.3 The Local Authority Designated Officer for Allegations (LADO) **Cheshire: email concerns to: i-ART@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk**

If judged appropriate during the initial contact with the LADO, an Allegations Referral Form must be completed by the senior manager in full and forwarded to the LADO via email within 24 hours. LADO referral form, flowcharts and information can be accessed here for <https://www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk/policy-and-procedures/allegations-management-lado/>

The LADO procedure does not replace safeguarding procedures Cheshire I-ART (I-ART@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk) must be contacted if you have a safeguarding concern about a child. If you require advice about your agency's response to an allegation, please contact your HR provider.

The LADO can only provide advice and guidance regarding allegations in relation to a person in a position of trust. Any general safeguarding enquiries or concerns for Cheshire Learners to IArt (0300 123 7047 i-ART@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk).

Allegations involving digital evidence (messages, images, AI-generated content, deepfakes) must be shared with the LADO and treated as potential safeguarding concerns.

KCSIE 2026 reinforces that LADOs should be consulted where concerns relate to online behaviour, even if the conduct occurred outside centre or outside working hours.

DSLs should ensure staff know updated local routes for reporting concerns involving online harm, exploitation, or digital misconduct, including Cheshire West & Chester I-ART.

centres should ensure allegation management processes incorporate emerging risks briefed by Cheshire West & Chester SCB, including contextual safeguarding, digital coercion, and online harmful sexual behaviour.

10 Preventing Radicalisation:

Protecting children from the risk of radicalisation should be seen as part of centres wider safeguarding duties and is similar in nature to protecting children from other forms of harm and abuse. During the process of radicalisation, it is possible to intervene to prevent 'susceptible' people being radicalised.

Radicalisation refers to the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism. There is no single way of identifying an individual who is likely to be susceptible to an extremist ideology. Specific background factors may contribute to vulnerability which are often combined with specific influences such as family, friends or online, and with specific needs for which an extremist or terrorist group may appear to provide an answer. The internet and the use of social media in particular has become a major factor in the radicalisation of young people. As with managing other safeguarding risks, staff should be alert to changes in children's behaviour which could indicate that they maybe in need of help or protection. centre staff should use their professional judgement in identifying children who might be at risk of radicalisation and act proportionately which may include making a referral to the Channel programme

Staff must be aware of emerging online harms highlighted in KCSIE 2026, including AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfakes, nudification apps, and digital coercion, which are increasingly used by extremist groups to groom, shame, or manipulate young people. KCSIE 2026 emphasises the growing influence of online misogyny, incel ideology, extremist digital communities, and harmful sexual behaviour, all of which can act as pathways into radicalisation.

centres should ensure Prevent risk assessments include digital radicalisation indicators, such as encrypted messaging, extremist online forums, algorithm-driven content, and online peer networks.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB briefings on extremism, contextual safeguarding, CME, and exploitation, as vulnerabilities often overlap. Staff should be alert to contextual safeguarding factors such as peer influence, online networks, domestic abuse, coercive control, and mental health vulnerabilities, which may increase susceptibility to extremist narratives.

10.1 Prevent - From 1 July 2015 all centres are subject to a duty under section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 ('The CTSA 2015') centres must have regard to statutory PREVENT GUIDANCE issued under section 29 of the CTSA 2015. Paragraphs 57-76 of the Prevent guidance are concerned specifically with centres' responsibility to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. This duty is known as the Prevent duty. It applies to a wide range of public-facing bodies.

The statutory Prevent guidance summarises the requirements on centres in terms of four general themes:

- risk assessment
- working in partnership
- staff training
- IT policies

centres are expected to **assess the risk** of children being drawn into terrorism, including support for extremist ideas that are part of terrorist ideology. This means being able to demonstrate both a general understanding of the risks affecting children and young people in the area and a specific understanding of how to identify individual children who may be at risk of radicalisation and what to do to support them. centres and colleges should have clear procedures in place for protecting children at risk of radicalisation. **It is not necessary for centres and colleges to have distinct policies on implementing the Prevent duty.** The Prevent duty builds on **existing local partnership arrangements**. For example, governing bodies and proprietors of all centres should ensure that their safeguarding arrangements take into account the policies and procedures of Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships (LSCPs).

For Cheshire learners, contact

[i-ART in the first instance i-ART@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:i-ART@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

The Prevent guidance refers to the importance of Prevent awareness training to equip staff to identify children at risk of being drawn into terrorism and to challenge extremist ideas. Individual centres are best placed to assess the training needs of staff in the light of their

assessment of the risk to pupils at the centre of being drawn into terrorism. As a minimum, however, centres should ensure that the designated safeguarding lead undertakes Prevent awareness training and is able to provide advice and support to other members of staff on protecting children from the risk of radicalisation.

centres must ensure that children are safe from terrorist and extremist material when accessing the internet in centres. centres should ensure that suitable filtering is in place. It is also important that centres teach pupils about online safety more generally. Further information and guidance is available

<https://www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk/professionals/extremism-and-radicalisation/>

The Department for Education has also published advice for centres on the Prevent duty and is intended to complement the Prevent guidance and signposts other sources of advice and support.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-children-from-radicalisation-the-prevent-duty>

Prevent training should now include awareness of AI-generated extremist content, deepfake propaganda, and digital manipulation used to recruit or influence young people.

centres must ensure IT filtering systems are updated to detect emerging extremist digital trends, including nudification apps, extremist gaming platforms, and encrypted communication channels.

Staff should receive briefings on online misogyny, incel-linked radicalisation, and digital coercion, as these are identified in KCSIE 2026 as growing extremist pathways.

DSLs should ensure Prevent procedures align with updated local guidance from Cheshire West & Chester SCB, including early help pathways and contextual safeguarding frameworks. centre will incorporate digital literacy and critical thinking into curriculum content to help pupils recognise extremist manipulation, misinformation, and online grooming.

10.2 Channel

centre staff should understand when it is appropriate to make a referral to the Channel team. Channel is a programme which focuses on providing support at an early stage to people who are identified as being vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. It provides a mechanism for centres to make referrals if they are concerned that an individual might be vulnerable to radicalisation. An individual's engagement with the programme is entirely voluntary at all stages.

Section 36 of the CTSA 2015 places a duty on local authorities to ensure Channel panels are in place. The panel must be chaired by the local authority and include the police for the relevant local authority area. Following a referral the panel will assess the extent to which

identified individuals are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism, and, where considered appropriate and necessary consent is obtained, arrange for support to be provided to those individuals. Section 38 of the CTSA 2015 requires partners of Channel panels to co-operate with the panel in the carrying out of its functions and with the police in providing information about a referred individual. centres and colleges are required to have regard to Keeping Children Safe in Education and, as partners, are required to cooperate with local Channel panels. Channel guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/channel-and-prevent-multi-agency-panel-pm-ap-guidance>

More on Channel and Prevent Process

Channel referrals should consider digital evidence, including extremist online activity, AI-generated content, deepfake communications, or involvement in harmful online communities.

KCSIE 2026 highlights the need for Channel panels to understand emerging digital radicalisation methods, including algorithm-driven content, online misogyny, and incel-linked extremism.

DSLs should ensure staff know updated local referral routes, including Cheshire West & Chester I-ART, for concerns involving online extremist influence.

Channel assessments should incorporate contextual safeguarding, recognising that vulnerabilities may overlap with exploitation, domestic abuse, mental health concerns, or online harm.

Staff should be aware that early indicators of radicalisation may now appear primarily online, including sudden changes in digital behaviour, secretive internet use, or engagement with extremist influencers.

11 Child Missing Education: All children, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to a full-time education which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have. Local authorities have a duty to establish, as far as it is possible to do so, the identity of children of compulsory centre age who are missing education in their area, or those 'unexplainable and or/persistent absences from education'.

KCSIE 2026 identifies CME as a critical safeguarding risk, particularly where online harm, exploitation, domestic abuse, or coercive control may be present.

Staff should be aware that children missing education may also be experiencing digital coercion, involvement in harmful online communities, or exposure to AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfakes, or nudification apps.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB briefings on CME, exploitation, early help pathways, and contextual safeguarding.

11.1 A child going missing from education is a potential indicator of abuse or neglect. Centre staff should follow the procedures for dealing with children that go missing from education, or those 'unexplainable and or/persistent absences from education', particularly on repeat occasions, to help identify the risk of abuse and neglect, including sexual exploitation, and to help prevent the risks of their going missing in future.

KCSIE 2026 emphasises that CME may indicate online grooming, digital coercion, extremist influence, or harmful sexual behaviour, and staff should consider these risks when patterns of absence emerge.

Staff should be alert to contextual safeguarding factors such as peer networks, online communities, domestic abuse, and parental vulnerabilities, which may contribute to persistent absence.

CME should always be cross-referenced with risks such as county lines, modern slavery, trafficking, FGM, forced marriage, and radicalisation, as highlighted in updated local guidance.

11.2 centres should put in place appropriate Child Protection - Safeguarding policies, procedures and responses for children who go missing from education, particularly those 'unexplainable and or/persistent absences from education', on repeat occasions or for prolonged periods. It is essential that all staff are alert to signs to look out for and the individual triggers to be aware of when considering the risks of potential safeguarding concerns such as travelling to conflict zones, FGM and forced marriage.

The law requires all centres to have an admission register and, with the exception of centres where all pupils are boarders, an attendance register. All pupils must be placed on both registers. An appropriate response is needed when a child has poor attendance or is regularly missing education, or those 'unexplainable and or/persistent absences from education'. [Missing Education guidance is here.](#)

centres should ensure CME procedures include consideration of emerging online harms, including AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfakes, nudification apps, and digital coercion. Staff should be aware that children missing education may be experiencing online exploitation, including financial exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour, or extremist grooming.

DSLs should ensure staff receive updated local briefings from Cheshire West & Chester SCB on CME, contextual safeguarding, and early help pathways.

11.3 All settings must inform their local authority of any pupil who is going to be deleted from the admission register where they:

- have been taken out of centre by their parents and are being educated outside the centre system e.g. home education
- have ceased to attend centre and no longer live within reasonable distance of the centre at which they are registered
- have been certified by an appropriate medical practitioner as unlikely to be in a fit state of health to attend centre before ceasing to be of compulsory centre age, and neither he/she nor his/her parent has indicated the intention to continue to attend the centre after ceasing to be of compulsory centre age
- are in custody for a period of more than four months due to a final court order and the proprietor does not reasonably believe they will be returning to the centre at the end of that period; or,
- have been permanently excluded.

KCSIE 2026 reinforces that deregistration concerns should consider digital indicators, including online grooming, coercive control, or extremist influence.

Staff should be alert to situations where parents remove children from centre due to online exploitation, domestic abuse, or harmful cultural practices, and ensure these are shared with the local authority.

DSLs should ensure deregistration processes align with updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB CME protocols.

11.4 The local authority must be notified when a centre is to delete a pupil from its register under the above circumstances. **centres should contact the Admissions section: Tel: 0151 666 4600.** This should be done as soon as the grounds for deletion are met, but no later than deleting the pupil's name from the register. It is essential that centres comply with this duty, so that local authorities can, as part of their duty to identify children of compulsory centre age who are missing education, or those 'unexplainable and or/persistent absences from education', follow up with any child who might be in danger of not receiving an education and who might be at risk of abuse or neglect.

All settings must inform the local authority of any pupil who fails to attend centre regularly, or has been absent without the centre's permission for a continuous period of 10 centre days or more, at such intervals as are agreed between the site and the local

authority (or in default of such agreement, at intervals determined by the Secretary of State).

CME notifications should include any concerns relating to online harm, including AI-generated content, digital coercion, or involvement in harmful online communities. KCSIE 2026 emphasises that persistent absence may indicate misogyny/incel influence, extremist grooming, financial exploitation, or modern slavery, and these should be shared with the local authority.

centres should ensure attendance monitoring systems incorporate digital safeguarding indicators, including sudden changes in online behaviour or withdrawal from digital learning platforms.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated local CME guidance from Cheshire West & Chester SCB, including expectations for reporting patterns of absence linked to exploitation

12 Child Sexual Exploitation & Child Exploitation (CE):

12.1 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) - CSE occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

All staff should be aware of the indicators of abuse, neglect and exploitation (see below), understanding that children can be at risk of harm inside and outside of the centre/college, inside and outside of home, and online. Exercising professional curiosity and knowing what to look for is vital for the early identification of abuse and neglect so that staff are able to identify cases of children who may be in need of help or protection.

All staff should be aware that abuse, neglect, exploitation, and safeguarding issues are rarely standalone events and cannot be covered by one definition or one label alone. In most cases, multiple issues will overlap.

All staff, but especially the designated safeguarding lead (and deputies) should consider whether children are at risk of abuse or exploitation in situations outside their families. Extra familial harms take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple harms including (but not limited to) sexual abuse (including harassment and exploitation), domestic abuse in their own intimate relationships (teenage relationship abuse), criminal exploitation, serious youth violence, county lines and radicalisation. The department provide: [Child sexual exploitation: guide for practitioners](#).

KCSIE 2026 emphasises that CSE is increasingly facilitated through digital manipulation, including AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfake coercion, and online blackmail. Staff should be alert to online misogyny, incel influence, harmful sexual behaviour, and digital coercion,

which are now recognised as pathways into CSE. Indicators of CSE should include sudden changes in online behaviour, secretive internet use, involvement in harmful online communities, or unexplained possession of digital devices. DSLs should ensure staff access updated local CE guidance from Cheshire West & Chester SCB, including digital exploitation indicators.

12.2 Child Criminal Exploitation: While there is still no legal definition of 'Child Criminal Exploitation' or CCE, it is increasingly being recognised as a major factor behind crime in communities across Merseyside and the UK, while also simultaneously victimising vulnerable young people and leaving them at risk of harm. A simple definition of CCE is: CCE often occurs without the victim being aware that they are being exploited and involves young people being encouraged, cajoled or threatened to carry out crime for the benefit of others. In return they are offered friendship or peer acceptance, but also cigarettes, drugs (especially cannabis), alcohol or even food and accommodation.

KCSIE 2026 identifies digital recruitment as a major emerging trend in CCE, including coercive messaging, online grooming, and manipulation through gaming platforms. Staff should be aware that CCE may involve financial exploitation, digital debt bondage, or coercion using AI-generated threats or deepfake content.

DSLs should ensure staff receive updated local briefings on CCE, county lines, contextual safeguarding, and exploitation pathways.

12.3 County lines is a term used to describe gangs, groups or drug networks that supply drugs from urban to suburban areas across the country, including market and coastal towns, using dedicated mobile phone lines or 'deal lines'. They exploit children and vulnerable adults to move the drugs and money to and from the urban area, and to store the drugs in local markets. They will often use intimidation, violence and weapons, including knives, corrosives and firearms. County lines is a major, cross-cutting issue involving drugs, violence, gangs, safeguarding, criminal and sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and missing persons, and the response to tackle it involves the police, the National Crime Agency, a wide range of Government departments, local government agencies and voluntary and community sector organisations. County lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing and exploitation has a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults and local communities.

KCSIE 2026 identifies digital recruitment as a major emerging trend in CCE, including coercive messaging, online grooming, and manipulation through gaming platforms. Staff should be aware that CCE may involve financial exploitation, digital debt bondage, or coercion using AI-generated threats or deepfake content.

DSLs should ensure staff receive updated local briefings on CCE, county lines, contextual safeguarding, and exploitation pathways.

12.4 Child Sexual Exploitation & Child Criminal Exploitation: Both CSE and CCE are forms of abuse and both occur where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance in power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child into sexual or criminal activity. Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources. In some cases, the abuse will be in exchange for something the victim needs or wants and/or will be to the financial benefit or other advantage (such as increased status) of the perpetrator or facilitator. The abuse can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females and children or adults.

The abuse can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse. It can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence. Victims can be exploited even when activity appears consensual, and it should be noted exploitation. As well as being physical can be facilitated and/or take place online.

Further information and documentation can be found here
<https://www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk/professionals/child-exploitation/>

KCSIE 2026 emphasises that both CSE and CCE are now frequently facilitated online, including through AI-generated content, deepfake coercion, nudification apps, and digital grooming.

Staff should recognise that exploitation may appear consensual online, including manipulated sexual imagery, coerced communication, or digital debt bondage.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated local CE/CCE guidance from Cheshire West & Chester SCB, including digital exploitation indicators and contextual safeguarding frameworks.

Staff should be aware that exploitation often overlaps with modern slavery, financial exploitation, domestic abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, and radicalisation, requiring coordinated multi-agency intervention.

13 Sexual harassments, violence, violence against women and girls (VAWG) harmful sexual behaviours (inc. child on child abuse and 'upskirting')

13.1 Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex. It can also occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually

harassing a single child or group of children. Sexual violence refers to sexual offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, including rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault.

KCSIE 2026 identifies AI-generated sexual imagery, deepfakes, nudification apps, and digital coercion as emerging forms of sexual violence that staff must recognise.

Staff should be aware that sexual violence may now be facilitated entirely online, including through manipulated images, threats, or coercive digital behaviour.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB VAWG and HSB briefings, including digital indicators of sexual violence.

13.2 It is important that settings are aware of sexual violence and the fact children can, and sometimes do, abuse their peers in this way. When referring to sexual harassment we mean 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature' that can occur online and offline and both inside and outside of centre/college. When we reference sexual harassment, we do so in the context of child on child, sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is likely to: violate a child's dignity, and/or make them feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated and/or create a hostile, offensive or sexualised environment.

Sexual harassment increasingly occurs online, including unsolicited sexual images, AI-generated nudes, deepfake harassment, and harmful sexualised messaging. KCSIE 2026 emphasises the role of online misogyny, incel ideology, harmful sexual behaviour, and digital coercion in peer-on-peer sexual harassment. Staff should be alert to digital indicators such as secretive online behaviour, involvement in harmful online communities, or sudden changes in digital communication patterns.

13.3 Staff must challenge any form of derogatory and sexualised language or behaviour. Staff should be vigilant to sexualised/aggressive touching/grabbing. DfE guidance situates sexual violence, sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour in the context of developing a whole-centre safeguarding culture, where sexual misconduct is seen as unacceptable, and not 'banter' or an inevitable part of growing up. Advice about tackling and reporting sexual harassment in centres and colleges can be found in KCSIE 2026. The tool, and included guidance sets out, for different age ranges what are expected and normal behaviours, what are inappropriate or concerning, and what are likely to be harmful. For each level of behaviour, the tool provides clear advice about how to respond. Cheshire identification tools can be found here:
<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/residents/health-and-social-care/adult-social-care/isab/documents/multi-agency-assessment-toolkit.pdf>

It should be recognised that these issues are likely to occur, and so settings should have procedures in place to deal with them. Groups at particular risk include girls, students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender+ (LGBT+), or are perceived by peers to be LGBT+, and pupils with SEND. We recognise that these children can be targeted by other children, so it is vital your centre provide a safe space for these children to speak out and share their concerns with members of staff. Learners are protected from 'upskirting', bullying, homophobic, biphobic and transphobic behaviour, racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. Staff have familiarity with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), the Human Rights Act 1998 and recent reforms to the Act and how they apply to safeguarding.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/human-rights-act-reform-a-modern-bill-of-rights/outcome/human-rights-act-reform-a-modern-bill-of-rights-consultation-response>

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) refers to a range of crimes, with the common theme that they disproportionately affect women and girls. This strategy has been developed to help professionals identify, prevent and respond to all gender-based violence.

The strategy includes a comprehensive local delivery plan, and with its emphasis on prevention and education involves closer work with centres and colleges. This can be viewed here: VAWG Strategy.

Staff must recognise that harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) now frequently begins online, including through nudification apps, deepfake creation, coercive messaging, and sexualised digital challenges.

KCSIE 2026 requires centres to ensure staff receive briefings on emerging online harms, including AI-generated sexual imagery and digital manipulation.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB HSB tools, including digital behaviour indicators.

Staff should be aware that VAWG concerns increasingly involve online misogyny, incel influence, extremist digital communities, and coercive online behaviour.

13.4 Our setting acknowledges the need to treat everyone equally, with fairness, dignity and respect. Any discriminatory behaviours are challenged, and children are supported to understand how to treat others with respect. We also have a statutory duty to report and record any of the above incidents. Settings must record incidents across the whole spectrum

of sexual violence, sexual harassment, and harmful sexualised behaviours so that they can understand the scale of the problem in their own setting and make appropriate plans to reduce it. For more guidance go to: [Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in centres and colleges \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/publications/sexual-violence-and-sexual-harassment-between-children-in-centres-and-colleges)

All such incidents should be immediately reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or equivalent and managed in line with your setting's child protection policies. Victims of harm should be supported by the centres support staff and their wishes and feelings considered and that the law on child-on-child abuse is there to protect them, not criminalise them.

KCSIE 2026 emphasises that centres must record incidents involving digital sexual harm, including AI-generated images, deepfakes, online harassment, and coercive digital behaviour.

DSLs should ensure staff understand contextual safeguarding factors such as online peer networks, digital grooming, domestic abuse, coercive control, and harmful sexual behaviour.

Staff should be aware that children targeted for sexual harassment or VAWG may also be experiencing online exploitation, financial coercion, or digital blackmail.

13.5 The appropriate safeguarding lead person should be familiar with the full guidance from the UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS), Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-advice-for-education-settings-working-with-children-and-young-people>

Upskirting - 'Upskirting' is where someone takes a picture under a person's clothing (not necessarily a skirt) without their permission and or knowledge, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks (with or without underwear) to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm. It is a criminal offence. Anyone of any gender, can be a victim. The Voyeurism (Offences) Act, which is commonly known as the Upskirting Act, came into force on 12 April 2019.

What is consent? Consent is about having the freedom and capacity to choose. Consent to sexual activity may be given to one sort of sexual activity but not another, e.g. to vaginal but not anal sex or penetration with conditions, such as wearing a condom. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during sexual activity, and each time activity occurs. Someone consents to vaginal, anal or oral penetration only if s/he agrees by choice to that penetration and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice.

Further information about consent can be found here: [Rape Crisis England & Wales](#)

Sexual consent

- a child under the age of 13 can never consent to any sexual activity
- the age of consent is 16

KCSIE 2026 identifies AI-generated nudes, deepfakes, nudification apps, and digital sexual coercion as critical emerging risks that must be included in centre responses to sharing nudes/semi-nudes.

Staff should be aware that upskirting may now occur digitally, including digitally manipulated images, deepfake upskirting, or AI-generated voyeuristic content.

DSLs should ensure staff access updated local guidance from Cheshire West & Chester SCB on digital sexual harm, VAWG, and harmful sexual behaviour.

centres should ensure pupils receive education on digital consent, online boundaries, and emerging sexual risks, including AI-generated content and coercive digital behaviour.

14 Digital Safety, Remote Learning & Filtering and Monitoring:

The use of technology has become a significant component of many safeguarding issues. Child sexual exploitation; radicalisation; sexual predation- technology often provides the platform that facilitates harm. An effective approach to online safety empowers a setting to protect and educate the whole site's community in their use of technology and establishes mechanisms to identify, intervene and escalate any incident where appropriate.

The breadth of issues classified within online safety is considerable, but can be categorised into three areas of risk:

- content: being exposed to illegal, inappropriate or harmful material
- contact: being subjected to harmful online interaction with other users
- conduct: personal online behaviour that increases the likelihood of, or causes, harm

There is a Digital Safety policy, which covers the use of mobile phones, cameras and other digital recording devices e.g., i-Pads. For online safety, there is within the policy support about children accessing the internet whilst they're on site using data on their phones (3G or 4G networks). The policy reinforces the importance of online safety, including making parents aware of what your setting ask children to do online (e.g. sites they need to visit or who they'll be interacting with online) Governing bodies and proprietors are doing all that

they reasonably can to limit children's exposure to the risks from the centre's or college's IT system and ensure the centre or college has appropriate filters and monitoring systems in place and regularly review their effectiveness.

For online safety, there is recognition in this guidance that most children are using data on their phones, on the 3G or the 4G network. In centres, this means that not only must staff think about filtering and monitoring within the centre's infrastructure, but they also need to have a policy about children accessing the internet whilst they're at centre.

14.1 Filtering and monitoring

Governing bodies and proprietors should be doing all that they reasonably can to limit children's exposure to the above risks from the settings IT system. As part of this process, governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their centre or college has appropriate filters and monitoring systems in place.

Whilst considering their responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and provide them with a safe environment in which to learn, governing bodies and proprietors should consider the age range of their pupils, the number of learners, how often they access the IT system and the proportionality of costs vs risks. Additional support documents can be found here: [digital safety](#)

The appropriateness of any filters and monitoring systems are a matter for individual centres and settings and will be informed in part, by the risk assessment required by the Prevent Duty. The UK Safer Internet Centre has published guidance as to what "appropriate" filtering and monitoring might look like:

UK Safer Internet Centre: appropriate filtering and monitoring. There is guidance below designed to help parents and carers to keep their children as safe as possible when online is here:

<https://www.livewell.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/Information/Details/4698?categoryId=4926>

All staff are to understand their role in the published standards for 'Filtering and Monitoring'. and DSLs are expected to have the 'lead responsibility'. The standards can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-digital-and-technology-standards-in-centres-and-colleges/filtering-and-monitoring-standards-for-centres-and-colleges>

Further support on digital safety, filtering and monitoring can be found here:

Filtering and Monitoring has been added to the full staff CPD programme and governing body/trustees will be supported to understand their role in Filtering and Monitoring. DSL's

will have 'lead responsibility' for Filtering and Monitoring and this forms part of their job description.

KCSIE 2026 requires filtering and monitoring systems to detect emerging digital harms, including nudification apps, deepfake creation tools, extremist content, and AI-generated sexual imagery.

DSLs must ensure filtering and monitoring systems are reviewed against updated DfE Digital & Technology Standards, with explicit consideration of AI-related risks.

Staff should be trained to recognise digital indicators of exploitation, including sudden changes in online behaviour, use of encrypted apps, or attempts to bypass filtering.

Governing bodies should ensure risk assessments include online misogyny, incel influence, harmful sexual behaviour, digital coercion, and extremist grooming, as highlighted in KCSIE 2026.

centres should ensure monitoring systems capture activity on personal devices using mobile data, not just centre Wi-Fi.

14.2 The policy for remote learning that demonstrates an understanding of how to follow Child Protection (safeguarding) procedures when planning remote education strategies and teaching remotely. The centre maintains the capability to provide remote education when it is not possible for some or all of their pupils to attend in person. (All IT policies are located on the Google Drive)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/providing-remote-education-guidance-for-centres>

KCSIE 2026 emphasises that remote learning policies must include safeguards against AI-generated impersonation, deepfake communication, and digital coercion.

Staff should be aware that remote learning environments may increase risks of online grooming, harmful sexual behaviour, domestic abuse exposure, and digital exploitation.

DSLs should ensure remote learning procedures align with updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB digital safety guidance, including contextual safeguarding considerations.

Remote learning platforms should include secure communication protocols, monitoring of inappropriate digital behaviour, and clear expectations for staff-pupil online interaction.

centres should ensure pupils receive education on safe digital behaviour during remote learning, including recognising manipulation, reporting concerns, and understanding digital consent.

15 Pre-Appointment Checks and Safer Recruitment:

15.1 Any offer of appointment made to a successful candidate, including one who has lived or worked abroad, must be conditional on satisfactory completion of the necessary pre-employment checks.

KCSIE 2026 reinforces that pre-appointment checks must now consider emerging online risks, including digital behaviour, online associations, and publicly available content that may indicate safeguarding concerns.

centres should ensure conditional offers explicitly reference online due-diligence checks, including searches for harmful digital behaviour, extremist content, misogyny/incel influence, or inappropriate online conduct.

15.2 When appointing new staff, centres and colleges must

- Verify a candidate's identity. Identification checking guidelines can be found on the GOV.UK website
- obtain (via the applicant) an enhanced DBS certificate (including barred list information, for those who will be engaging in regulated activity);
- obtain a separate barred list check if an individual will start work in regulated activity before the DBS certificate is available
- centres that work with children between 8 and 18 years old must recognise that the 'relationships and associations' that staff have in centre and outside (including online), may have an implication for the safeguarding of children in the centre. Where this is the case, the member of staff must speak to the centre (Childcare Act 2006 – as amended).
- verify the candidate's mental and physical fitness to carry out their work responsibilities. A job applicant can be asked relevant questions about disability and health in order to establish whether they have the physical and mental capacity for the specific role;
- verify the person's right to work in the UK. If there is uncertainty about whether an individual needs permission to work in the UK, follow advice on the GOV.UK website;
- if the person has lived or worked outside the UK, make any further checks the centre or college consider appropriate and verify professional qualifications, as appropriate.
- carry out prohibition check for all staff with QTS
- complete a risk assessment for each volunteers to decide whether they need to do an enhanced DBS check or not. (Please note:, even if it is decided an enhanced DBS is to be requested, if the volunteer is not in regulated activity, then you're not legally allowed to do a barred list check).
- Carrying out an online search on shortlisted candidates as part of due diligence (and informing them of this prior to any searches) to help identify any issues that are publicly available online

The Education and Training (Welfare of Children) Act 2021 extended safeguarding provisions to providers of post 16 Education: 16-19 Academies, Special Post-16 institutions and Independent Training Providers.

15.3 The centre's safer recruitment policy should focus on ensuring potential applicants are given the right messages about the settings commitment to recruit suitable people. Further safer recruitment guidance can be found in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024)

KCSIE 2026 emphasises that "relationships and associations" now include online associations, digital communities, and social media activity that may present transferable risk.

Online searches must include checks for AI-generated sexual imagery involvement, deepfake creation, nudification apps, harmful sexual behaviour online, extremist digital content, misogyny/incel ideology, and digital coercion.

centres should ensure safer recruitment training includes awareness of emerging digital harms and how they relate to suitability to work with children.

DSLs and senior leaders should ensure recruitment processes align with updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB safer recruitment guidance, including digital risk indicators.

15 Single Central Record:

15.4 the Centre must keep a single central record. The single central record must cover the following people:

- all staff (including supply staff, and teacher trainees on salaried routes) who work at the centre: in colleges, this means those providing education to children; and
- The information that must be recorded in respect of staff members (including teacher trainees on salaried route) is whether the following checks have been carried out or certificates obtained, and the date on which each check was completed/certificate obtained:
 - an identity check / a barred list check / an enhanced DBS check/certificate / a prohibition from teaching check
 - further checks on people who have lived or worked outside the UK; this would include recording checks for those EEA teacher sanctions and restrictions

- a check of professional qualifications; and a check to establish the person's right to work in the United Kingdom.

KCSIE 2026 requires SCR processes to include confirmation that online searches have been completed, with dates recorded.

centres should ensure SCR entries reflect checks for digital behaviour concerns, including harmful online activity, extremist content, or inappropriate digital conduct.

DSLs should ensure SCR processes align with updated Cheshire West & Chester SCB safer recruitment expectations, including digital safeguarding considerations.

15.5 For supply staff, settings should also include whether written confirmation that the employment business supplying the member of supply staff has carried out the relevant checks and obtained the appropriate certificates, whether any enhanced DBS check certificate has been provided in respect of the member of supply staff, and the date that confirmation was received.

Supply agencies must confirm they have completed online due-diligence checks on candidates, including digital behaviour screening.
centres should request written confirmation that supply staff have been screened for emerging digital risks, including harmful sexual behaviour online or extremist digital content.

15.6 A record of staff leavers must be maintained on the Single Central record. SCR leaver records should include any relevant digital safeguarding concerns identified during employment, where appropriate and lawful.

15.7 Maintained setting governors - Governors in maintained centres are required to have an enhanced criminal records certificate from the DBS. It is the responsibility of the governing body to apply for the certificate for any of their governors who does not already have one. Governance is not a regulated activity and so they do not need a barred list check unless, in addition to their governance duties, they also engage in regulated activity. Governors should also be subject to online due-diligence checks, in line with KCSIE 2026 expectations around digital behaviour and transferable risk.
centres should ensure governor induction includes awareness of digital safeguarding responsibilities, including online conduct and digital risk indicators.

15.8 The SCR shall be updated in the light of any further legislation. SCR updates must reflect new KCSIE 2026 requirements relating to digital behaviour checks, online associations, and emerging online harms.

15.9 Where centre premises are used for non-centre activities, those providers are expected to meet the guidance in Keeping Children Safe in Out of centre Settings. Providers using centre premises must demonstrate compliance with updated KCSIE 2026 expectations around digital safety, including online conduct, filtering and monitoring, and digital safeguarding policies. centres should ensure external providers have robust procedures for managing digital risks, including harmful sexual behaviour online, extremist content, and digital coercion.