

Guidance | Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026

Implementation Briefing for Early Years providers



About this Briefing



Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Every member of staff plays a vital role in keeping children safe and promoting their welfare. A child-centred approach should underpin all decisions and actions.

Annex A

Additional safeguarding information and emerging risks.

Annex B

Detailed information regarding safeguarding leadership responsibilities that may support DSL practice in early years settings.

Annex C

Guidance on regulated activity and supervision.

Annex D

Summary of key changes from KCSIE 2025.

Introduction

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026 is the Department for Education's statutory safeguarding guidance for schools and colleges in England. Whilst the guidance does not apply directly to most early years providers in the same way as it does to schools and colleges, early years settings should have due regard to its principles and expectations alongside the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework.

The EYFS remains the primary statutory framework for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in early years provision, including nurseries, pre-schools, maintained nursery schools, childminders and out-of-school providers caring for younger children. However, KCSIE provides important insight into safeguarding developments, emerging risks and good practice that are relevant across the wider children's workforce.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Young children are particularly vulnerable and depend on trusted adults to recognise concerns, take appropriate action and work effectively with families and partner agencies to support their safety and wellbeing. KCSIE 2026 reinforces the importance of a strong safeguarding culture, early intervention, information sharing and professional curiosity - all of which align closely with EYFS requirements.

This briefing provides early years leaders, managers, owners, committees, trustees, designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) and practitioners with a practical overview of the key changes introduced through KCSIE 2026 and the areas most relevant to early years provision.

Understanding the KCSIE Structure

Although written primarily for schools and colleges, early years leaders and DSLs may find the following sections particularly useful.

Part 1: Safeguarding Information for All Staff

Key safeguarding information all practitioners should understand, including recognising abuse, neglect and exploitation and knowing how to respond appropriately.

Part 2: The Management of Safeguarding

Guidance regarding safeguarding leadership, policies, training, information sharing, multi-agency working and online safety.

Part 3: Safer Recruitment

Information regarding pre-employment checks, DBS requirements, regulated activity and ongoing suitability.

Part 4: Safer Recruitment

Managing allegations, low-level concerns and concerns regarding staff, volunteers and contractors.

Key Updates relevant to Early Years in 2026

Early Identification, Early Help and Family Help

One of the most significant themes throughout KCSIE 2026 is the importance of identifying concerns early and ensuring children and families receive support before needs escalate. Early years providers are often the first professionals to identify concerns regarding:

- Neglect
- Domestic abuse.
- Parental mental health
- Poor home conditions.
- Substance misuse.
- Developmental concerns
- Explicit reference to The Lullaby Trust guidance
- Family stress.

Settings should ensure staff understand:

- Local Family Help pathway
- Early Help processes.
- Referral routes
- Local safeguarding thresholds.
- Escalation procedures
- The role of professional curiosity

Mental Health and Safeguarding

Although mental health concerns are often discussed in relation to older children, early years practitioners play a key role in identifying indicators of emotional distress within children and families.

Staff should understand

that:

- Mental health difficulties may be linked to safeguarding concerns.
- Parental mental ill-health can impact children's welfare.
- Behaviour and emotional presentations may indicate unmet needs.
- Wider family circumstances should always be considered.
- Settings should work closely with health visitors, family support services and children's social care where concerns arise.

Serious Violence and Contextual Safeguarding

While serious violence may seem less relevant to younger children, KCSIE highlights the importance of recognising environmental risks affecting children and their families.

Early years providers should remain alert to:

- Domestic abuse
- Criminal exploitation within families
- Gang-related activity affecting parents or siblings
- Community violence
- County lines activity impacting family circumstances
- Practitioners may identify concerns through conversations, observations or changes in a child's presentation and behaviour

Child-on-Child Behaviour and Harmful Behaviour

The principles underpinning child-on-child abuse remain relevant within early years settings.

Staff should understand:

- Harmful behaviours should never be dismissed as simply “part of growing up.”
- Inappropriate sexualised behaviours require assessment and consideration.
- Children may display concerning behaviour because they have witnessed or experienced abuse.
- Incidents should be recorded and responded to proportionately.
- Settings should maintain a culture where concerns are identified and addressed at the earliest opportunity.

Online Safety, Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technology

Online safety remains an important safeguarding consideration, even for very young children.

Emerging risks include:

Frequent Emergency planning guidance.

- AI-generated imagery
- Deepfake content
- Image-based abuse
- Technology-facilitated exploitation
- Online grooming
- AI chatbots

Staff should understand that young children may access online content through:

- Tablets
- Smartphones
- Gaming devices
- Smart TVs
- Home digital assistants
- Providers should support parents in understanding these evolving risks

Regulated Activity Changes

One of the most important operational developments relates to regulated activity following implementation of the Crime and Policing Act 2026.

Key changes include:

- Frequent activity is now defined as more than 3 days within a 30-day period.
- Overnight activity remains regulated activity.
- More volunteer roles may now fall within regulated activity.
- Providers should review volunteer arrangements and supervision arrangements.
- Settings should review:
 - Parent helpers
 - Reading volunteers
 - Student placements
 - Activity providers
 - Contractors
 - Committee members where applicable
 - Volunteer Vetting and DBS Requirements

Providers should undertake a review of:

- Volunteer arrangements
- DBS checking processes
- Supervision arrangements
- Suitability procedures
- Risk assessments

Leaders should ensure individuals undertaking regulated activity receive the appropriate level of DBS and barred list checks.

Filtering and Monitoring

Settings should review filtering and monitoring arrangements where children have access to internet-enabled devices

Leaders should:

- Review filtering systems regularly.
- Ensure online safety risk assessments remain current.
- Monitor safeguarding incidents involving technology.
- Ensure those responsible for governance receive safeguarding assurance

Key Updates relevant to Early Years in 2026 continued

Information Sharing

A central safeguarding message throughout KCSIE 2026 is:

Data protection legislation should never become a barrier to safeguarding children

Early years providers should ensure:

- Information is shared promptly.
- Records are accurate and secure.
- Safeguarding concerns are escalated appropriately.
- Child protection records transfer securely when children move settings.
- Staff understand lawful information sharing.
- Children Questioning their Gender

KCSIE 2026 includes extensive guidance relating to children questioning their gender.

For early years providers, the key principles remain:

- A child-centred safeguarding approach.
- Consideration of the child's welfare and best interests.
- Partnership working with parents in most circumstances.
- Careful and proportionate decision-making.
- Accurate record keeping.
- Ongoing review of support arrangements

Leaders and DSLs should familiarise themselves with this section alongside existing EYFS requirements and local safeguarding guidance.

Top 10 priorities before 1 September 2026

01. Update the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

02. Review safer recruitment procedures.

03. Review volunteer arrangements.

04. Audit DBS and suitability arrangements.

05. Update safeguarding training.

06. Review online safety arrangements.

07. Review information-sharing procedures.

08. Update Family Help referral pathways.

09. Brief governance bodies on KCSIE 2026 changes.

10. Review safeguarding culture across the setting.

Questions owners, committees and trustees should ask

Key questions include:

- Q How have we considered the relevant aspects of KCSIE 2026?
- Q Have safeguarding policies been updated?
- Q Are volunteer arrangements compliant?
- Q Are DBS and suitability processes robust?
- Q How effective are our online safety arrangements?
- Q How are emerging AI risks being addressed?
- Q Do staff understand Family Help pathways?
- Q How do we assure ourselves information sharing is effective?
- Q Have safeguarding records been audited?
- Q How do we know safeguarding culture is strong and effective?

Actions for Leaders

01. Review safeguarding and child protection policies.
02. Audit safer recruitment procedures.
03. Review regulated activity arrangements.
04. Review volunteer management processes.
05. Audit DBS and suitability checks.
06. Ensure safeguarding training is updated.
07. Review Family Help referral pathways.
08. Strengthen information-sharing procedures.
09. Review online safety arrangements.
10. Ensure robust record-keeping systems are in place.
11. Review staff supervision processes.
12. Promote a strong safeguarding culture where children's welfare is paramount.
13. Ensure governance bodies receive regular safeguarding reports.

Actions for Staff

01. Volunteer vetting and DBS reform.
02. Enhanced safer recruitment expectations.
03. New banned dog breed provisions.
04. Comprehensive safer sleep requirements.
05. Screen use guidance.
06. Stronger disqualification procedures.
07. Enhanced emergency planning expectations.
08. Follow information-sharing procedures.
09. Attend safeguarding training.
10. Maintain professional boundaries.
11. Always act in the best interests of the child.

Overall Conclusion

KCSIE 2026 reinforces many safeguarding principles already embedded within the EYFS, including early intervention, multi-agency working, information sharing, safer recruitment and a strong safeguarding culture.

Although written primarily for schools and colleges, the guidance contains important learning and emerging safeguarding themes that early years providers should consider as part of their ongoing safeguarding

arrangements. For leaders, DSLs, owners, committees and trustees, the priority is to review current practice, strengthen safeguarding systems and ensure that every child receives the right support at the right time.

Ultimately, effective safeguarding in the early years depends on vigilance, professional curiosity, strong partnership working and an unwavering commitment to promoting the welfare of children.

Useful Support, Guidance And Resources

01. [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026.](#)
02. [Working Together to Safeguard Children.](#)
03. [EYFS Framework.](#)
04. Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships (LSCPs).
05. Local Authority Early Help and Family Help Services.
06. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH).
07. [NSPCC Learning](#) – safeguarding, child protection and mental health resources.
08. [NSPCC Helpline.](#)
09. [UK Safer Internet Centre.](#)
10. Childnet.
11. KidsOnlineWorld.
12. [National Crime Agency \(NCA\) CEOP Education.](#)
13. [The Children's Society.](#)
14. [Contextual Safeguarding Network.](#)
15. [Education Against Hate.](#)
16. [Prevent Duty Guidance.](#)
16. [ACT Early.](#)
17. Local Prevent Teams.
18. [NHS Children and Young People's Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\).](#)
19. [Mental Health Support Teams \(MHSTs\).](#)
20. [Anna Freud Centre.](#)
21. [Regulated Activity in Relation to Children: Scope Guidance.](#)
22. [National Association of Designated Safeguarding Leads \(NADSL\).](#)