

INFORMATION SHARING

Information sharing is key to the Government's goal of delivering better, more efficient public services that are coordinated around the needs of the individual. It is essential to enable early intervention and preventative work, for safeguarding and promoting welfare and for wider public protection. Information sharing is a vital element in improving outcomes for all.

The Government understands that it is most important that people remain confident that their personal information is kept safe and secure and that practitioners maintain the privacy of the individual, whilst sharing information to deliver better services. It is therefore important that practitioners can share information appropriately as part of their day-to-day practice and do so confidently.

Practitioners recognise the importance of information sharing and there is already much good practice. However, in some situations, they feel constrained from sharing information by uncertainty about when they can do so lawfully, especially in early intervention and preventative work where information sharing decisions may be less clear than in safeguarding or child protection situations. For those who have to make decisions about information sharing on a case-by-case basis, this document seeks to give clear practical guidance, drawing on experience and consultation from across a spectrum of adult and children's services.

Sharing information where there are concerns about significant harm to a child or young person

It is critical that where you have reasonable cause to believe that a child or young person may be suffering or may be at risk of suffering significant harm, you should always consider referring your concerns to children's social care or the police, in line with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) procedures.

In some situations there may be a concern that a child or young person may be suffering, or at risk of suffering significant harm, or of causing significant harm to another child or serious harm to an adult. However, you may be unsure whether what has given rise to your concern constitutes 'a reasonable cause to believe'. In these situations, the concern must not be ignored. You should always talk to someone to help you decide what to do – a lead person on safeguarding or another practitioner who knows the person. You should protect the identity of the child or young person wherever possible until you have established a reasonable cause for your belief.

Significant harm to children and young people can arise from a number of circumstances – it is not restricted to cases of deliberate abuse or gross neglect. For example a baby who is severely failing to thrive for no known reason could be suffering significant harm but equally could have an undiagnosed medical condition. If the parents refuse consent for further medical investigation or an assessment, then you may still be justified in sharing information. In this case, the information sharing would be to help ensure that the causes of the failure to thrive are correctly identified.