

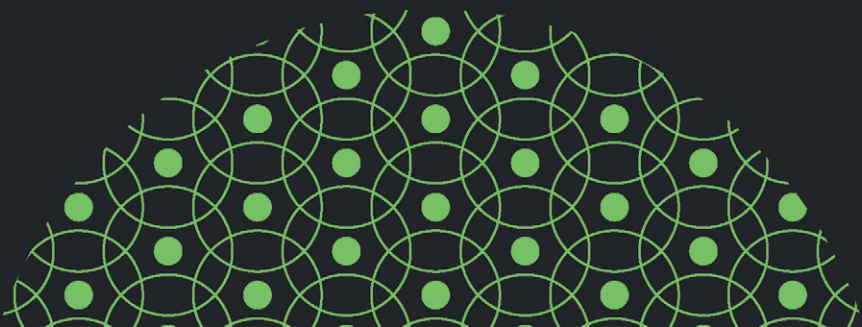


EMERALD POINTS

# UNDERSTANDING SAFEGUARDING FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

A Guide for Students, ECTs and  
School Support Staff

**DR WILLIAM MCGOVERN**  
**DR AIDAN GILLESPIE**  
**DR HELEN WOODLEY**



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School Support Staff

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*For my children, Demi, Riley, Oscar and Henry, for their love and inspiration*

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# FOREWORD

Teachers, school management teams and school support staff have a duty and moral obligation to identify and respond to Safeguarding concerns and to support and protect children in their care. Reading about Safeguarding, what it is, what it entails and how it should be responded to in educational contexts is a relatively easy concern. Understanding how children end up in positions of vulnerability in the first place, the nature of Safeguarding risks and concerns and how to enhance pupil engagement and teaching practice in relation to Safeguarding is far more difficult. In developing and organising this edited collection we seek to provide a resource that supports you in learning about these latter types of concerns but also complements the wider endeavours of schools, universities, trainee teachers/ECTs and school support staff in relation to understanding and meeting the needs of pupils who may be vulnerable or at risk of safeguarding concerns. In preparing this collection we have made no assumptions about your prior knowledge, but we do recognise that if you are new to this subject area or teaching, then you may feel a little overwhelmed by the volume of concerns that are contained in this collection and the implications of them. Please do not be! If you are simply ‘visiting’ the ‘collection’, then you will quickly realise that each and every chapter has something to offer in terms of increasing your knowledge and understanding of Safeguarding. If you are stopping with us and reading the ‘collection’ in an ‘in-depth’ way (we hope this is the case), then you will undoubtedly have a far more comprehensive insight. All we ask you to do from here is to reflect on what you read and issues raised here in relation to your role, how you teach and how you engage with children. We also encourage you to go find ‘space’ in your practice to have conversations with your colleagues and children when relevant about your practice, your perspectives and the ways in which your understanding informs your practice and the quality of your teaching in relation to Safeguarding.

William, Aidan and Helen

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## Section One

# SAFEGUARDING, VULNERABILITY, FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Understanding Concepts of Vulnerability; in this opening section we will introduce, explore and contextualise how concepts such as social, economic, familial and individual vulnerability are understood. Illustrative topics which will be covered will be focussed on contextual safeguarding, perceptions and definitions of vulnerability and how these might be encountered and supported within the education setting and wider education practice. Specific reference will be made in this section to explore how perceptions of vulnerability inform practice and the ways in which vulnerability concerns are believed to adversely affect children's education and wellbeing, then their learning and development. One of the key focusses within this opening section relates to identifying the dangers associated with assuming a particular type of harm or the lack of harm can be associated with a particular type of vulnerability, family structure and/or family functioning.

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# WHY SCHOOLS, WHY NOW AND WHY SAFEGUARDING

Aidan Gillespie, Helen Woodley and William McGovern

## ABSTRACT

*All school staff (teaching and support) now have a duty and obligation to protect and safeguard children in their care. To be able to do this, school staff need to understand what safeguarding is and how to respond, but also need to understand a number of other concepts such as: why children end up in vulnerable situation in the first place, how teaching practices reduce vulnerability, and how to engage with children and young people in an effective and efficient manner. This chapter explores these latter types of concerns and in doing so identifies that teachers and support staff are key professionals in identifying vulnerability, preventing the escalation of concerns, engaging with children and supporting them and their education over time as they engage with and attend school. This chapter also contains a detailed breakdown of the structure and the content of this edited collection and concludes with reflective comments about the implications of this collection for you as an individual and in your career: working with children and young people in educational establishments.*

**Keywords:** Safeguarding; professionals; prevention; engagement; protection; teachers

## INTRODUCTION

All school staff (teaching and support) now have a duty and obligation to protect and safeguard children in their care. To be able to do this, school staff need to understand what safeguarding is and how to respond, but also need to understand a number of other concepts such as: why children end up in vulnerable situations in the first place, how teaching practices reduce vulnerability, and how to engage with children and young people in an effective and efficient manner. This chapter explores these types of concerns and in doing so identifies that teachers and support staff are key professionals in identifying vulnerability, preventing the escalation of concerns, engaging with children and supporting them over time as they engage with and attend school. This chapter also contains a detailed breakdown of the structure and the content of this edited collection (chapter by chapter) and concludes with some reflective comments about the implications of this collection for you as an individual and in your career: working with children and young people in educational establishments.

## THE SAFEGUARDING CONCERN

Many of the problems and issues which children face in relation to their personal lives, educational experiences and attainment are caused by factors that exist outside schools. Yet despite this, all educational establishments and all school staff now have a clear ‘duty’ and ‘responsibility’ to respond to safeguarding concerns, whilst also providing a safe environment for children to develop and learn: *Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE, 2018)*; *Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2021)*. Alongside these safeguarding requirements, all school staff are also expected to be particularly alert to specific risks and the needs of children in particular groups or sets of circumstances children face in their daily living experiences (*McGovern & McGovern, 2021*). In policy documents on safeguarding, it is relatively easy to identify and define individuals, groups and sub-groups who are deemed to be more vulnerable to risk. Examples include children with a disability, Special Educational Needs (SEN), young carers, immigrant populations, children in supported accommodation, children affected by food poverty and insecurity or with difficult family circumstances (parental drug and alcohol use, mental health and IPV), children who use illicit drugs themselves and children who are underage alcohol users are also deemed vulnerable to risks they largely

create themselves. Some policy documents provide details of the impact these risks have in relation to young people; they illustrate the ways children and young people engage in risky health behaviours, have poorer health, get involvement in antisocial behaviour (National Crime Agency (NCA), 2019), have lower educational attainment, increased truancy from school and the way that these ‘children’ are more likely to be in absence to school and/or be permanently excluded. Within many policy documents, however, there is often no consideration given to explaining why children, young people and their families find themselves in positions of risk or vulnerability in the first place; Nor is there ever much emphasis given to recognising the importance of the teacher-pupil attachment when it comes to reducing vulnerability whilst enhancing pupil engagement and improving teaching practice. More specifically the voice of the child is often omitted from the debate alongside a more detailed consideration of how protective factors and professional practice in schools can be utilised to enhance the experiences of pupils in relation to their participation, engagement with staff and educational attainment.

Policy documents such as Working Together (DfE, 2018) and, more specifically, Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2021) have had, and will continue to have, major implications for the schools, educational establishments, safeguarding leads, children and individual teaching and support staff. As a minimum requirement, all schools are expected to have a named safeguarding lead, a management structure and protocols for dealing with incidents and to provide training for trainee/newly qualified teachers alongside regular CPD updates and training for established staff (DfE, 2018). There is a perception that FE colleges and other HE Institutions are starting to provide opportunities for student teachers and qualified teachers to develop their understanding of vulnerability and the role of teachers and teaching in relation to dealing with reducing vulnerability and safeguarding concerns. However, despite these factors, evidence from serious case reviews still shows that poor practice in schools can result from failing to identify the early signs of vulnerability and failing to refer on early signs of risk. Other factors include wider school processes, such as: poor record keeping, failing to take the voice of the child into consideration, failing to reassess concern, share information and not challenging to those who seem to not be taking action (DfE, 2021). The important thing to consider here is that the concerns associated with poor school practice in relation to safeguarding and professional practice are wholly preventable and that improvements in school and teaching practice have the potential to positively benefit staff and pupils alike.

## PROFESSIONALS, PREVENTION, ENGAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

The ‘duty’ and ‘responsibility’ on educational establishments and teachers to respond to safeguarding and vulnerability concerns is also underpinned by the Teachers’ Standards (DfE, 2012). To be able to start to work towards responding appropriately and efficiently, teachers (and support staff) can only benefit from having a more in-depth understanding of concepts like safeguarding and vulnerability. However, a critical self-awareness of how their own personal perceptions of children/childhood, vulnerability and risk inform their practice is also needed. Put as simply as possible, if those working with children do not understand or if their perceptions of vulnerability on risk are incorrect, then they are more likely to miss opportunities to identify, protect and safeguard children. More specifically, those working with children need to recognise that how they perceive something or someone often informs how they relate to them but also more specifically how they then practice towards them, how they understand their needs and what they can do to help/intervene (Olson, Seidler, Goodman, Gaelic, & Nordgren, 2004).

The concept of safeguarding children in education is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This morally driven imperative recognises that every child has the right to an education and that the purpose of education is to endeavour to provide an environment that enables children to develop to their fullest potential, and ensuring they learn respect for the rights of others and fundamental freedoms (Hammarberg, 1990). Schools and school management teams, teachers and professional staff that can align their practices to the articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in relation to providing a non-discriminating environment, acting in the best interests of the child, adhering to the child’s right to life, survival and development, the right to express opinions are better able and more likely to create a safer, more child friendly and effective learning environment for children (Hammarberg, 1990). To be able to move towards meeting these obligations and rights, schools and teaching staff need to first recognise that the child has a life and lived experience both inside and outside the school. These social worlds cannot and should not be separated and it would be naive to assume or fail to recognise that one does not affect the other. Schools, school management teams and individual teachers working with smaller groups or classrooms need to consider factors like diversity, inclusive practice and education as protective factors when it comes to developing and creating a more positive culture within schools and the learning environment. Children who find themselves in high-risk situation (as we will discuss) claim that schools are essential in helping them deal with concerns and in providing them with a positive opportunity to separate themselves mentally

and physically from their outside world concerns. They also recognise and report that schools provide routine and a sense of daily stability for them and that they manage best in their daily living experiences when they feel like they are part of a network of emotionally and practically useful relationships. Children also identify that they are more likely to respond positively to peers and professionals and more likely to engage with them, when they felt others had their best interests at heart (Bancroft, Wilson, Cumingham-Burley, Backett-Millburn, & Masters, 2004).

Teachers are ideally placed to observe children, identify risk and communicate with children and young people about issues that might be concerning them. They are also better placed to monitor children, assess ongoing personal and educational needs and support behaviour change in children over time (DfE, 2018). As significant non-parental adults, teachers are also able to exert significant influence on children, their values, beliefs and the choices children make in relation to their lives and any personal issues they may face (Galbo, 1989). This is why, in relation to safeguarding, keeping children in education and keeping children safe in education is vital (DfE, 2021). To be able to engage with children effectively, teachers and support staff need to understand the power and impact of their own agency and a range of concepts like labelling, stigma, fear and how these concepts can restrict children from engaging with them or from coming forward for support under their own volition. Building good relationships with children requires a person-centred approach, clarity about role and expectations and effective communication between both parties. If the relationship is felt as personal between the teacher and child, if children feel safe and if they derive a level of satisfaction from the relationship with their teacher, children and young people are more likely to engage with them in a meaningful way (Galbo, 1989). As a teacher, or someone who engages with children and young people and as someone with a duty to respond to safeguarding concerns, if you can build relationships of this nature, then children and young people are more likely to confide in you, discuss personal issues with you and be willing to listen to and act upon your advice.

## THE CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF THIS COLLECTION

This specialist collection of edited chapters draws on and presents the work of research active academics, empirical researchers, educational consultants and teachers from a whole range of settings, countries and subject areas. It has had an interdisciplinary focus from its conceptualization and development, and collaborators who are involved provide perspectives from the fields of Education, Educational Psychology, Developmental Child Psychology, Social Psychology, Applied Sociology, Disability Studies, Public Health, Social Work, Health and Social Policy. In many of the individual chapters presented here, academics and researchers from different discipline areas have come together as co-authors and/or with practice partners to offer contributions which cut across different priority and discipline areas. The main audience for the book is undergraduate teachers, ECTs, safeguarding leads, school management teams and other professional staff who work with children in educational establishments. However, the book is one collective story and each of the chapters as stand-alone piece of work will have relevance and appeal to those early career professionals in the fields of Social Work, Childhood Studies, Youth Work and the Early Years.

The collection is split into three separated yet connected sections. In this opening section, we begin by exploring and challenging concepts of social, economic, familial and individual vulnerability and safeguarding. Illustrative topics which are covered here focus on the different perceptions and definitions of *Safeguarding*, *Vulnerability*, *Family Functioning* and how these might be understood, encountered and supported within the education setting and wider education practice. The chapter immediately following this one is provided by Jenny Lloyd and Tom Disney: *Schools and Safeguarding*. In this chapter, Lloyd and Disney explore the important concept of Contextual Safeguarding and help us to start to *think through spaces and contexts of vulnerability and harm*. This work is then followed by separate chapter contributions from Aidan Gillespie: *Vulnerability or Vulnerabilities* and Ralph Leighton: *Vulnerability-Labels*. Gillespie's work here *contestations of applied markers of identity* is concerned with providing insight and reflection on the politics of identity and the limiting and reductivist ways in which vulnerability is imposed on children and professionals. Leightons' contribution on *labels and labelling* goes a step further in deepening our understanding of the arbitrary ways in which labelling is used and how the process of labelling disadvantages those given the label and those who are responsible for labelling. In this wonderfully reflective piece, Leighton charges us to approach professional practice with common sense, professional awareness and human decency. The