



Information sharing guidance for practitioners

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Agency Responsibility Under The Children Act 2004	3
3. Seven Golden Rules For Information Sharing	4
4. Sharing Information Where There Are Concerns About Significant Harm – Tier 5	5
5. Sharing Information Where the Child is a Child in Need – Tier 4.....	6
6. Information Sharing In Specific Circumstances	7
6.1 Across Borders.....	7
6.2 Children moving out of Calderdale who are supported at Tier 2 or 3 of the Continuum of Need	8
6.3 Child Exploitation	8
7. Obtaining and Processing (Storing) Personal Information About ‘Significant Others’	9
8. Professionals Meetings.....	11
Appendix 1.....	12
Explanation of when and how to share information.....	12
Appendix 2.....	13
Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme	13
Appendix 3.....	14
The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme	14
Appendix 4.....	15
Myth-busting guide to information sharing	15

1. Introduction

This procedure should be read in conjunction with HM Government '[Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#)' and '[Information sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers](#)' (July 2018); and [West Yorkshire Interagency Procedures](#).

A key factor in many Serious Case Reviews¹ (including local Serious Case Reviews) has been a failure to record information, to share it, to understand the significance of the information shared, and to take appropriate action in relation to known or suspected abuse or neglect. Often it is only when information from a number of sources has been shared that it becomes clear that a child is at risk of, or is suffering, harm.

Working Together 2018, notes:

“Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to promote the welfare, and protect the safety, of children....” And

“Effective sharing of information between practitioners and local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision to keep children safe.”

Legal Principles and Obligations

In addition to the statutory guidance following from the Children Act 2004, the key legal concepts, legislation and terminology relevant to information sharing are contained in:

- The Data Protection Act 2018
- General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR);
- The Human Rights Act 1998;
- The common law duty of confidence².

¹ Pathways to harm, pathways to protection: a triennial analysis of serious case reviews, 2011 to 2014

² The general position is that if information is given in circumstances where it is expected that a duty of confidence applies, that information cannot normally be disclosed without the information provider's consent.

In practice, this means that all information, whether held on paper, computer, visually or audio recorded, or held in the memory of the professional, must not normally be disclosed without the consent of the service user. It is irrelevant for example how old the service user is, or what the state of his/her mental health is; the duty still applies.

Three circumstances making disclosure of confidential information lawful are:

- where the individual to whom the information relates has consented;
- where disclosure is necessary to safeguard the individual, or others, or is in the public interest; or
- where there is a legal duty to do so, for example a court order.

2. Agency Responsibility Under The Children Act 2004

The statutory guidance on Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 states that in order to safeguard and promote children's welfare, the agencies covered by Section 11 should make arrangements to ensure that:

- All professionals in contact with children understand what to do and the most effective ways of sharing information if they believe that a child and family may require particular services in order to achieve positive outcomes;
- All professionals in contact with children understand what to do and when to share information if they believe that a child may be a Child in Need, including those children who have suffered, or are likely to suffer significant harm;
- Appropriate agency-specific guidance is produced to complement guidance issued by central government, and such guidance and appropriate training is made available to new staff as part of their induction and ongoing training;
- Guidance and training specifically covers the sharing of information between professions, organisations and agencies, as well as within them, and arrangements for training take into account the value of multi-agency as well as single agency training;
- Managers in Children's Services are fully conversant with the legal framework and good practice guidance issued for professionals working with children.

The statutory guidance on **Section 10 of the Children Act 2004** makes it clear that **effective information sharing supports the duty to cooperate to improve the well-being of children.**

Local authorities and their partner agencies should ensure that their employees:

- Are supported in working through these issues.
- Understand what information is and is not confidential, and the need in some circumstances to make a judgement about whether confidential information can be shared in the public interest, without consent.
- Understand and apply good practice in sharing information at an early stage as part of preventative work.
- Are clear that information can normally be shared where a child is judged to be at risk of Significant Harm or that an adult is at risk of serious harm.

Agencies should:

- Each appoint a senior manager, a lead information officer, responsible for decisions relating to information sharing within the agency, who can determine controversial issues.
- Develop common documentation, systems and a joint approach to multi-disciplinary and multi-agency information sharing.

- Encourage children and their parents to see information sharing in a positive light, as something which makes it easier for them to receive the services they need.

Further, 'Information sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers' 2018 states:

All organisations should have arrangements in place, which set out clearly the processes and the principles for sharing information internally. In addition, these arrangements should cover sharing information with other organisations and practitioners, including third party providers to which local authorities have chosen to delegate children's social care functions, and the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)³ still operating within the local authority area as well as safeguarding partners.

One approach to aid effective information sharing is the use of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs, where teams may be co-located physically or locally. In these settings, it is important that accountability is defined to ensure that teams know who is responsible for making decisions and that actions taken are in the best interest of the child.

Safeguarding partnersand LSCB's... should play a strong role in supporting information sharing between and within organisations and addressing any barriers to information sharing. This should include ensuring that a culture of appropriate information sharing is developed and supported as necessary by multi-agency training.

Safeguarding partners and LSCBs ... can require an individual or body to comply with a request for information, as outlined in sections 16H and 14B of the Children Act 2004, respectively. This can only take place when the information requested is for the purpose of enabling or assisting the safeguarding partners or LSCB to perform their functions. Any request for information to a person or body, should be necessary and proportionate to the reason for the request. Safeguarding partners and LSCBs should be mindful of the burden of requests and should explain why the information is needed.

3. Seven Golden Rules For Information Sharing

HM Government 'Information Sharing: Advice for Practitioners providing Safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers' provides seven golden rules for Information Sharing:

- Remember that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Data Protection Act 2018 and human rights law are not barriers to justified information sharing, but provide a framework to ensure that personal information about living individuals is shared appropriately;

³ Working Together 2018 introduced Safeguarding Children Partnerships to replace LSCBs

- Be open and honest with the person (and/or their family where appropriate) from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will, or could be shared, and seek their agreement, unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so;
- Seek advice from other practitioners, or your information governance lead, if you are in any doubt about sharing the information concerned, without disclosing the identity of the individual where possible.
- Where possible, share information with consent, and where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to having their information shared. Under the GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 you may share information without consent if, in your judgement, there is a lawful basis to do so, such as where safety may be at risk. You will need to base your judgement on the facts of the case. When you are sharing or requesting personal information from someone, be clear of the basis upon which you are doing so. Where you do not have consent, be mindful that an individual might not expect information to be shared.
- Consider safety and wellbeing: Base your information sharing decisions on considerations of the safety and wellbeing of the individual and others who may be affected by their actions.
- Necessary, proportionate, relevant, accurate, timely and secure: ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those people who need to have it, is accurate and up to date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely;
- Keep a record of your decision and the reasons for it - whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose.

4. Sharing Information Where There Are Concerns About Significant Harm – Tier 5

When professionals who work with, or have contact with children, parents or adults who are in contact with children, have reasonable cause to suspect that a child may suffering or may be at risk of suffering Significant Harm, they should always share information with Calderdale Children's Social Care (MAST)⁴.

While, in general, professionals should seek to discuss any concerns with the family and, where possible, seek their agreement to making referrals to MAST, there will be some circumstances where professionals should not seek consent e.g. where to do so would:

- Place a child at increased risk of Significant Harm.
- Place an adult at risk of serious harm.
- Prejudice the prevention or detection of a serious crime.

⁴ Multi-Agency Screening Team

- Lead to unjustified delay in making enquiries about allegations of Significant Harm.

In some situations there may be a concern that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer Significant Harm or of causing serious harm to others but professionals may be unsure whether what has given rise to concern constitutes 'a reasonable cause to believe'. In these situations, **the concern must not be ignored**.

Professionals should always take to their agency's nominated child protection adviser and, if necessary, a Caldicott Guardian who will have expertise in information sharing issues. **The child's best interests** must be the overriding consideration in making any decisions whether or not to seek consent.

Significant Harm to children can arise from a number of circumstances; it is not restricted to cases of deliberate abuse or gross neglect. 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 to further medical investigation or an assessment, professionals are still justified in sharing information for the purpose of helping ensure that the cases of the failure to thrive are correctly identified. A professional is likely to be justified to share information without consent for the purposes of identifying a child for whom preventative interventions are appropriate.

5. Sharing Information Where the Child is a Child in Need – Tier 4

If it is known that a child who is subject of a Child in Need plan in Calderdale has moved or is intending to move to another local authority, a referral and relevant information should be made immediately to the Children's Social Care (CSC) team in the area into which the child has moved (the 'receiving Local Authority area'). This will include a Case Transfer Summary, copies of any Child in Need plans and recent minutes of related meetings.

The general expectation is that agreement is sought from the family regarding the referral and provision of information and they should be kept informed by the referring authority of the progress of case transfer.

Where agreement to make the referral and share information cannot be reached and there are historic or current child protection concerns, then the protection of the child is paramount and the referral must be made. If there are any doubts, advice is to be sought from legal services or the Caldicott Guardian.

The receiving authority should make a decision about the level of risk or need of the case within 15 days of the referral, from which point, case responsibility is transferred. Where there is dispute about case responsibility or delay in the receiving authority accepting responsibility for the case, which is likely to impact on the child, the Children's Social Care escalation procedure should be used.

During any dispute the child's welfare remains paramount and the family must be presented with clear messages about services and expectations.

Any agency other than Social Care, that becomes aware of a child in their area who was/is a Child in Need from another area, should alert MAST that they are aware of the move. This responsibility is intended to provide assurance and act as a safeguard within local partnerships. This may be necessary where other agencies become aware of a child where no referral has been made from Social Care in the previous area due to timescales of the move or them not being informed as to the whereabouts of the family following a move.

If a Child in Need leaves for an unknown location Calderdale must consider issuing an alert subject to risk assessment.

6. Information Sharing In Specific Circumstances

6.1 Across Borders

At any stage in the process of working with children and their families, the parents and/or the child/children may move from one household to another, with a change of address possibly to another local authority area.

The move may be planned and relevant information shared in advance with the professionals and workers involved with the family and child/children.

In some circumstances, however, the move may take place in haste and as an attempt to avoid the involvement of professionals and agencies. In such circumstances, the agencies involved must assess the impact of the change in circumstances on the child/children.

Where children move to a new address - either within the same local authority area or to a new area – and there are concerns about the welfare of the children such that it is considered that a [Section 47 Enquiry](#) is required, the local authority for the last known address must make every effort to locate the children and complete the Section 47 Enquiry. See also [Children and Families who go Missing Procedure](#).

Professionals in all agencies should be alert to the possibility that a child or family who has moved may not be in receipt of universal services. Professionals should engage with the family in order to link them into local universal services, e.g.:

- Seeking information about the child / family (full names, dates of birth, previous address, GP's name, if attending any school etc);

The child's move may be temporary or permanent. If the parent is not prepared to give information or take advice, the receiving authority should assume the move is permanent and act accordingly.

The procedure to follow where there are concerns that a child may be suffering from or at risk of significant harm is covered in [Section 2 1.4.14 Children Moving Across Boundaries West Yorkshire procedures](#).

6.2 Children moving out of Calderdale who are supported at Tier 2 or 3 of the Continuum of Need

Agencies must also assess the impact of the change in circumstances on children who have been supported by a multi-agency Early Intervention plan (Tier 3) in Calderdale. If the child is subject to a multi-agency Early Intervention plan, and the move out of area is planned, the agencies involved with the child and family should agree, with parental consent, how and when information is transferred and shared with the equivalent agencies in the receiving authority and their expectations of those agencies in continuing to support the family. This should be reflected in a clear multi-agency plan.

If the move is unplanned, the agencies involved should hold a multi-agency meeting in order to discuss the change in circumstances and consider whether or not the needs of or risks to the child have increased. The outcome of this meeting should be recorded. If there is no increase in need or risk, the multi-agency Early Intervention plan should be updated and if parental consent has been given, agreement reached about how information will be shared with equivalent agencies in the receiving authority.

If no parental consent for transfer of information is given and there is no increase in risk or need, the universal agencies involved should ensure that their records are up-to-date and accurately reflect their involvement with the family, ensuring that their own records are forwarded to the receiving authority in a timely manner in accordance with their own procedures.

If any professional concludes that there is an increase in risk or unmet needs of the child and the child may be at risk of or suffering significant harm, a referral should be made to Children's Social Care in the receiving authority without delay.

If the whereabouts of the child and family is unknown and any professional concludes that there is an increase in risk to or unmet needs of the child and the child may be at risk of or suffering significant harm, a referral should be made to MAST.

6.3 Child Exploitation

The effective identification and recording of information and intelligence in relation to individual cases is crucial to the successful disruption and/or prosecution of perpetrators.

All people involved in caring for a child or young person who is suspected to be at risk of child exploitation or who is being exploited should continually gather, record and share information with the appropriate authorities. West Yorkshire Police have

introduced a Partnership Intelligence Portal as an alternative to a [proforma](#) to assist any practitioner to record and share 'intelligence' which may contribute to a bigger picture of exploitation of children. The Child Exploitation team (accessed via MAST) will work in partnership with their counterparts in other agencies to ensure that information and intelligence is recorded and shared appropriately.

Effective recording systems should be in place to enable information to be shared between agencies, support individual investigations and enable local areas to monitor and map child exploitation to identify specific problems and monitor trends.

Also see Appendix Two

7. Obtaining and Processing (Storing) Personal Information About 'Significant Others'

Learning from Serious Case Reviews and recent Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews has highlighted the importance of understanding the role of 'significant others' who play an active role in a child's life or who are frequent visitors to the home. For this reason, agencies are required to obtain and hold information about key individuals.

Legislation and regulations⁵ permit the processing of personal data (such as a name, address, phone number, email, or any pieces of information that when put together can identify an individual) when at least one of the following applies:

- a) **Consent:** the individual has given clear consent to process their personal data for a specific purpose.
- b) **Contract:** the processing is necessary for a contract the agency has with the individual, or because they have asked the agency to take specific steps before entering into a contract.
- c) **Legal obligation:** the processing is necessary for the agency to comply with the law (not including contractual obligations).
- d) **Vital interests:** the processing is necessary to protect someone's life.
- e) **Public task:** the processing is necessary for the agency to perform a task in the public interest or for their official functions, and the task or function has a clear basis in law.
- f) **Legitimate interests:** the processing is necessary for the legitimate interests of the agency or the legitimate interests of a third party, unless there is a good reason to protect the individual's personal data which overrides those legitimate interests. (**but** this cannot apply if the agency is a public authority processing data to perform its official tasks.)

⁵ [Data Protection Act 2018 / GDPR](#)

For the purposes of safeguarding the interests of a child or adult, it is likely that a number of these bases apply. Consent to obtain and process the information is not necessary (for example, when it would not be safe to contact the person about whom information is obtained), if information is processed under any of the other bases.

NB “**Processing**” personal information includes anything at all that is undertaken with any identifiable data - gathering, recording it, sharing it, storing it on paper, on a computer system, in an archive, etc.

Under GDPR, Individuals have the right to be informed about the collection and use of their personal data, this should be done by making a privacy notice available to them if possible at the point they are providing it, or as soon as possible afterwards. If personal data about someone is obtained from a third party, that individual should be provided with privacy information (e.g. a copy of a Privacy Notice or signposted to a relevant webpage etc) within a reasonable period of obtaining the data and within no later than one month.

However, when obtaining personal data from a third party, the individual does not have to be provided with privacy information if:

- the individual is already aware of the privacy information;
- providing the individual with the privacy notice would be impossible;
- providing the privacy information would involve a disproportionate effort;
- providing the privacy information would render impossible or seriously impair the achievement of the objectives of the processing;
- there is a legal requirement to obtain or disclose the personal data; or
- there is a legal obligation of professional secrecy which covers the personal data.

When information is collected and stored for safeguarding reasons, it is likely that one of the above exceptions would apply and in this circumstance it is not necessary to provide the individual with a privacy notice as long as the data protection principles are met and the information stored is fair and relevant etc).

All data should be processed in line with the **Data Protection Principles** i.e.

- a) processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to individuals
- b) collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and not further processed in a manner that is incompatible with those purposes
- c) adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary in relation to the purposes for which they are processed
- d) accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date
- e) kept in a form which permits identification of data subjects for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which the personal data are processed

- f) processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data, using appropriate technical or organisational measures

Information provided in confidence may be shared without consent if it is “justified in the public interest” – e.g. if the benefits to a child or young person that will arise from sharing the information outweigh both the public and the individual’s interest in keeping the information confidential.

8. Professionals Meetings

In some cases, for example, where agencies are working with a family who are frustrating or resisting intervention, or where professionals are ‘stuck’, it may be necessary to hold a professionals meeting - [see separate guidance](#).

Appendix 1

Explanation of when and how to share information

NB – Consent must be unambiguous, freely given and may be withdrawn at any time

1. You are asked to share information

2. Is there a clear and legitimate purpose for sharing information?

If No and you do not have consent, do not share. Record the information sharing decision and your reasons in line with your organisation or local procedures

If you are Unsure, seek advice

3. Do you have consent to share?

If Yes, you can share. Record the information sharing decision and your reasons in line with your organisation or local procedures

If you are Unsure, seek advice

4. If No, does the information enable an individual to be identified?

If No, you can share. Record the information sharing decision and your reasons in line with your organisation or local procedures

If Unsure, seek advice

5. If Yes, have you identified a lawful reason to share information without consent?

If Unsure, seek advice

If No, do not share. Record the information sharing decision and your reasons in line with your organisation or local procedures

If Yes, you can share. Record the information sharing decision and your reasons in line with your organisation or local procedures

6. When sharing information:

- Identify how much information to share
- Distinguish fact from opinion
- Ensure that you are giving the right information to the right individual
- Ensure where possible, you are sharing the information securely
- Inform the individual that the information has been shared if they were not aware of this as long as this would not create or increase risk of harm

If there are concerns that a child is in need, suffering or likely to suffer harm, then follow the relevant procedures without delay. Seek advice if unsure what to do at any stage and ensure that the outcome of the discussion is recorded.

Appendix 2

Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme

The Child Sex Offender Review (CSOR) Disclosure Scheme is designed to provide members of the public with a formal mechanism to ask for disclosure about people they are concerned about, who have unsupervised access to children and may therefore pose a risk. This scheme builds on existing, well established third-party disclosures that operate under the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).

Police will reveal details confidentially to the person most able to protect the child (usually parents, carers or guardians) if they think it is in the child's interests.

The scheme has been operating in all 43 police areas in England and Wales since 2010. The scheme is managed by the Police and information can only be accessed through direct application to them.

If a disclosure is made, the information must be kept confidential and only used to keep the child in question safe. Legal action may be taken if confidentiality is breached. A disclosure is delivered in person (as opposed to in writing) with the following warning:

- 'That the information must only be used for the purpose for which it has been shared i.e. in order to safeguard children;
- The person to whom the disclosure is made will be asked to sign an undertaking that they agree that the information is confidential and they will not disclose this information further;
- A warning should be given that legal proceedings could result if this confidentiality is breached. This should be explained to the person and they must sign the undertaking' (Home Office, 2011, p16).

If the person is unwilling to sign the undertaking, the police must consider whether the disclosure should still take place.

Appendix 3

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) commenced on 8 March 2014. The DVDS gives members of the public a formal mechanism to make enquires about an individual who they are in a relationship with, or who is in a relationship with someone they know, where there is a concern that the individual may be violent towards their partner. This scheme adds a further dimension to the information sharing about children where there are concerns that domestic violence and abuse is impacting on the care and welfare of the children in the family.

Members of the public can make an application for a disclosure, known as the 'right to ask'. Anybody can make an enquiry, but information will only be given to someone at risk or a person in a position to safeguard the victim. The scheme is for anyone in an intimate relationship regardless of gender.

Partner agencies can also request disclosure is made of an offender's past history where it is believed someone is at risk of harm. This is known as 'right to know'.

If a potentially violent individual is identified as having convictions for violent offences, or information is held about their behaviour which reasonably leads the police and other agencies to believe they pose a risk of harm to their partner, a disclosure will be made.

Appendix 4

Myth-busting guide to information sharing

Sharing information enables practitioners and agencies to identify and provide appropriate services that safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Below are common myths that may hinder effective information sharing.

Data protection legislation is a barrier to sharing information

No – the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR do not prohibit the collection and sharing of personal information, but rather provide a framework to ensure that personal information is shared appropriately. In particular, the Data Protection Act 2018 balances the rights of the information subject (the individual whom the information is about) and the possible need to share information about them.

Consent is always needed to share personal information

No – you do not necessarily need consent to share personal information. Wherever possible, you should seek consent and be open and honest with the individual from the outset as to why, what, how and with whom, their information will be shared. You should seek consent where an individual may not expect their information to be passed on. When you gain consent to share information, it must be explicit, and freely given. There may be some circumstances where it is not appropriate to seek consent, because the individual cannot give consent, or it is not reasonable to obtain consent, or because to gain consent would put a child's or young person's safety at risk.

Personal information collected by one organisation/agency cannot be disclosed to another

No – this is not the case, unless the information is to be used for a purpose incompatible with the purpose for which it was originally collected. In the case of children in need, or children at risk of significant harm, it is difficult to foresee circumstances where information law would be a barrier to sharing personal information with other practitioners.

The common law duty of confidence and the Human Rights Act 1998 prevent the sharing of personal information

No – this is not the case. In addition to the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR, practitioners need to balance the common law duty of confidence and the Human Rights Act 1998 against the effect on individuals or others of not sharing the information.

IT Systems are often a barrier to effective information sharing

No – IT systems, such as the Child Protection Information Sharing project (CP-IS), can be useful for information sharing. IT systems are most valuable when

practitioners use the shared data to make more informed decisions about how to support and safeguard a child.