



Keeping Your Child Safe

A Guide for Parents & Carers

- **Recognising risks**
- **Understanding warning signs**
- **Getting support**

Welcome

Dear Parents and Carers,
My name is Danielle Nugent, and I am the Designated Safeguarding Lead at Bedale High School.



At Bedale High School, the safety and wellbeing of every child is at the heart of everything we do. We know that growing up today can sometimes feel complicated for young people and families, with challenges both online and offline that can affect wellbeing, friendships, mental health, and personal safety.

This booklet has been created to support parents and carers in recognising possible concerns early, understanding some of the risks young people may face, and knowing where to seek help and advice if needed.

Safeguarding works best when schools and families work together openly and positively. We are committed to supporting parents and carers, sharing concerns early, and working together to help every child feel safe and supported.

If you ever have concerns about your child — no matter how small they may seem — I encourage you to reach out. Often, early conversations and shared support can make a significant difference. Sometimes children may not immediately talk about worries or difficulties, so maintaining open communication between home and school is incredibly important.

We want every child to feel safe, listened to, supported, and able to thrive both in and out of school.

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet and for continuing to work in partnership with us.

With best wishes,

Danielle Nugent
Designated Safeguarding Lead
Bedale High School

What is Safeguarding?

Safeguarding is:

Protecting children and young people from harm and supporting their wellbeing so they can grow up safe, happy, and healthy

It is everyone's responsibility, and it includes both home life and the wider world around them.

Safeguarding is about recognising concerns early, listening to children, and taking action when something doesn't feel right.

Contextual Safeguarding

Children and young people can experience harm in places outside the home. This includes their friendships, school, online spaces, and the wider community.

Contextual safeguarding helps us understand that risks can happen in different environments, not just within the family home.

Where risks can happen:

- At school or college
- Online (social media, messaging apps, gaming)
- In the community or local area
- Through peer groups or friendships
- During travel or time spent away from home

Types of risks may include:

- Peer pressure or coercion
- Bullying (including online bullying)
- Criminal or sexual exploitation
- Being influenced by older individuals
- Unsafe or unhealthy peer groups
- Exposure to drugs, alcohol, or risky behaviour

What is Exploitation?

Exploitation is when someone takes advantage of a child or young person for their own benefit. This can happen in person or online, and the child may not always realise they are being exploited.

Types of exploitation include:

- **Criminal exploitation** (being made to carry drugs, money, or weapons)
- **County lines exploitation** (being used to transport drugs or money)
- **Sexual exploitation** (being manipulated into sexual activity)
- **Online exploitation** (grooming or coercion through social media or gaming)

Exploitation often involves manipulation and control. A child may not realise they are being exploited.



Warning signs of exploitation:

- Going missing or staying out without explanation
- Receiving unexplained money, gifts, or items
- New older friends or controlling relationships
- Increased secrecy or changes in behaviour
- Possession of multiple phones or SIM cards
- Sudden changes in appearance, clothing, or language
- Becoming withdrawn or anxious

What parents/carers should do:

- Stay curious, not confrontational
- Look for patterns over time
- Report concerns early to school or safeguarding services
- Avoid directly accusing the child or peers
- Seek advice even if unsure

— Online Grooming & Manipulation

Online exploitation can happen through social media, messaging apps, gaming platforms, or live chat features.

Offenders may:

- Pretend to be someone younger
- Build trust over time ("grooming")
- Offer gifts, money, or attention
- Encourage secrecy
- Move conversations to private apps

Additional online risks:

- Pressure to send sexual images, or threats and blackmail involving images ('sextortion')
- Sharing personal information unknowingly
- Being added to unknown group chats
- Exposure to harmful content
- Influences from online communities promoting risk-taking behaviour

Signs of online harm:

- Becoming secretive about devices
- Anxiety after being online
- Deleting messages or accounts quickly
- Using multiple apps or hidden profiles
- Emotional distress linked to phone use

What helps keep children safe online:

- Regular, calm conversations about online life
- Knowing what apps and games they use
- Privacy settings and parental controls
- Encouraging children to report anything uncomfortable
- Reassuring them they will not be blamed

Warning Signs

Children may not always talk about concerns. Changes in behaviour, mood, or routine can sometimes be early signs that something is wrong. It's important to trust your instincts and notice patterns over time.

Behaviour Changes

- Becoming withdrawn or unusually quiet
- Sudden anger, aggression, or mood swings
- Loss of interest in hobbies or school
- Increased secrecy, especially around phones or friends
- Avoiding family or spending more time alone

Social & Contextual Changes

- New friends, especially older peer groups
- Spending more time away from home
- Going missing or returning late without explanation
- Unexplained money, gifts, or new possessions
- Changes in behaviour after being online or out

Emotional Changes

- Low mood, sadness, or appearing "down"
- Increased anxiety or worry
- Difficulty sleeping or changes in sleep patterns
- Talking about feeling hopeless or worthless
- Sudden lack of confidence



What does this mean and what can you do?

What those signs might mean

- Mental health difficulties
- Online harm or bullying
- Peer pressure or exploitation
- Stress or changes at home/school

How to respond as a parent/carer

- Talk to your child calmly and openly
- Listen without judgement
- Avoid jumping to conclusions
- Reassure them they are not in trouble
- Keep communication open
- Seek support early if concerns continue

Protective factors (what helps children cope)

Strong protective relationships can make a big difference to mental wellbeing.

- Feeling listened to and supported
- Stable home routines and boundaries
- Safe adults they can talk to
- Positive friendships and activities
- Feeling safe at home and school

When to seek further support

You should seek help if:

- Concerns continue or worsen over time
- Your child's daily life is being affected
- You are worried about self-harm or safety
- You feel unsure and need advice

Support can come from school, GPs, or mental health services.

Concerns may relate to mental health, online experiences, or peer relationships. These areas often overlap.

Understanding Mental Health

Mental health is about how a child thinks, feels, and copes with everyday life. Just like physical health, it can change over time and may need support. Many children and young people experience periods of stress, anxiety, or low mood, especially during times of change or pressure.

When to be concerned:

You may notice changes that last for more than a few weeks or seem out of character for your child.

Emotional signs:

- Persistent sadness or low mood
- Increased anxiety or worry
- Feeling overwhelmed or tearful
- Low self-esteem or negative self-talk
- Irritability or emotional outbursts

Behavioural signs:

- Withdrawing from family or friends
- Losing interest in activities they once enjoyed
- Changes in sleep patterns (too much or too little)
- Changes in eating habits
- Decline in school engagement or attendance

More serious indicators:

- Talking about hopelessness or not wanting to be here
- Self-harm or signs of injury without clear explanation
- Risk-taking or reckless behaviour
- Sudden and significant personality changes

How parents and carers can help

- Have calm, open conversations regularly
- Listen without interrupting or judging
- Avoid rushing to “fix” the situation
- Reassure them they are not in trouble
- Show patience — it may take time for them to open up
- Keep routines stable where possible

If you believe your child is at immediate risk of serious harm, call 999 or seek urgent medical help.

Vaping

Vaping is increasingly common among young people. While it is often seen as less harmful than smoking, it is not risk-free.

What you should know:

- Most vapes contain nicotine, which is addictive
- Nicotine can affect concentration, mood, and brain development
- Some young people may progress from vaping to smoking
- Long-term health effects are still not fully known

Possible signs of vaping:

- Sweet or unusual smells on clothing or in rooms
- Small devices (USB or pen-shaped items)
- Increased thirst, coughing, or throat irritation
- Asking for more money or unexplained spending
- Becoming secretive or defensive



Alcohol, Drugs & Other Substances

Young people may be exposed to alcohol or drugs through peers, social settings, or online influence. Early awareness and open conversations are key.

Risks include:

- Impact on physical and mental health
- Reduced concentration and school performance
- Risk-taking behaviour or poor judgement
- Vulnerability to exploitation or peer pressure

Possible warning signs:

- Sudden changes in behaviour or mood
- New or secretive friendship groups
- Missing money or valuables
- Decline in school engagement
- Unusual smells, paraphernalia, or items
- Becoming secretive or defensive

Open conversations are the most effective way to reduce risk.

Staying calm, listening, and talking regularly helps young people feel safe enough to make better choices and seek support if needed.



Other Safeguarding Concerns

Safeguarding includes many different risks that children and young people may experience. Some concerns are less obvious but can still have a serious impact on a child's safety and wellbeing.

Child-on-Child Abuse & Sexual Harassment

Children can sometimes harm other children. This may include bullying, sexual harassment, unwanted touching, sharing sexual images without consent, abusive language, intimidation, or harmful behaviour online.

Children may not always recognise that what has happened is abuse or may worry about getting themselves or others into trouble.

Parents and carers should:

- Encourage respectful relationships and conversations about consent and boundaries.
- Listen carefully if your child talks about inappropriate behaviour.
- Reassure them they have done the right thing by speaking up.
- Report concerns to the school promptly so they can be investigated and support provided.

Domestic Abuse

Children can be affected by domestic abuse even if they are not directly harmed. Seeing, hearing or living with abuse can affect their emotional wellbeing, behaviour, confidence and sense of safety.

Possible signs may include:

- Increased anxiety or fearfulness
- Changes in behaviour or sleep
- Becoming withdrawn or unusually protective of family members
- Difficulty concentrating at school



Radicalisation

Some young people may be vulnerable to being influenced by individuals or groups who encourage harmful or extreme views, either online or in person. This process is known as radicalisation.

Possible signs include:

- Sudden changes in beliefs or behaviour
- Expressing intolerant or extreme views
- Becoming isolated from friends or family
- Increased secrecy about online activity

If you are worried

If something does not feel right, trust your instincts. You do not need proof before seeking advice. Speak with the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or another trusted professional. Early support can help keep children safe and prevent concerns from becoming more serious.

What to Do If You're Worried

If you notice changes in behaviour, mood, or safety, it is important to act early. You do not need to have all the answers before seeking support.

Steps to take

1

Stay calm

Try to remain calm so the child feels safe and supported.

2

Listen

Let them talk at their own pace without interrupting.

3

Reassure

Let them know they are not in trouble and you are there to help.

4

Don't promise secrecy

Explain that you may need to share concerns to keep them safe.

5

Seek support early

Speak to the school or relevant professionals as soon as possible.

Where To Get Help

- Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) – Danielle Nugent
Contact via the school office: 01677 422419
- Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL) – Kalsooma Siddique
Contact via the school office: 01677 422419
- GP or health services
- Local authority safeguarding team 0300 131 2 131

Immediate Support

If a child is in immediate danger, **call 999**

For advice and support:

- NSPCC Helpline: 0808 800 5000
- Childline: 0800 1111
- Samaritans: 116 123 – emotional support for anyone in distress

You don't need to wait for things to get worse before asking for help.

Early support can make a significant difference to a child's safety and wellbeing.



Mr C Stokes – Headteacher

Mrs J Reed & Mr S Ingram – Co-Chairs of Governors

Bedale High School

Fitzalan Road, Bedale, North Yorkshire DL8 2EQ

Tel: 01677 422419