

SAFEGUARDING POLICY 2026

Review: Apr 2027

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INTRODUCTION

Local authorities have an overarching duty to promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults, and to safeguard them from abuse, keep them safe, and practise in a way that protects them.

Essex Outdoors recognises that, while it is the responsibility of the relevant statutory agencies to determine whether abuse has taken place, it is everyone’s responsibility to report any concerns and therefore our staff will know how to recognise and report safeguarding concerns.

This policy forms part of the safeguarding arrangements for Essex Outdoors and should be read in conjunction with the [Essex Outdoors Code of Practice](#) and the wider policies and procedures for Essex County Council (ECC), which when combined develop a comprehensive and robust framework for safeguarding, including: [Safer recruitment](#), [IT and Social Media](#), [Whistleblowing](#), [Complaints](#), [Health and Safety](#), [Finance](#), and [Equality, diversity and inclusion](#) (internal only Links).

Essex Outdoors will also ensure that our safeguarding policies and procedures are available on our website and on demand, for anyone using our services to know what to do if they have a concern.

Essex Outdoors follows the ECC complaints, grievance and whistleblowing policies and procedures.

PERSONS AFFECTED

This policy applies to everyone working/ volunteering on behalf of Essex Outdoors, including, paid employees, volunteers, sessional workers, contractors and agency staff. In this document all people working or volunteering for Essex Outdoors will be referred to as ‘staff’.

STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

There is government guidance set out in [Working Together \(DfE, 2026\)](#) on how agencies must work in partnership to keep children safe. In Essex, these arrangements sit under the [Essex Safeguarding Children Board \(ESCB\)](#)

In addition to national statutory guidance, In Essex, all professionals must work in accordance with the [SET Child Protection Procedures](#) (ESCB 2025)

Essex Outdoors also works in accordance with the following legislation and guidance:

Care Act 2014	Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015)	Safeguarding vulnerable groups act 2006
Children Act 1989	Data Protection Act 2018	Serious Crime Act 2015 (2015)
Children Act 2004	Working Together (2026)	Sexual Offences Act (2003)
Children and families act 2014	Education act 2002	Human rights act 1988
The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024	Disclosure and barring service core functions order 2012	Information sharing advice for safeguarding practitioners (2024)
Equality act 2010	Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025	Mental Capacity Act 2005
Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex (ESCB, 2024)		United nations convention on the rights of the child

RESPONSIBILITIES

All Staff are responsible for:

- Understanding and being familiar with the safeguarding policy and procedures
- Undertaking training to the appropriate level to support their role and ensure that this is regularly updated
- Following safe working practice
- Acting appropriately and being able to challenge inappropriate behaviour in others
- Being able to recognise signs of abuse
- Knowing how to follow and use the procedure for reporting concerns or alleged or suspected incidents of abuse
- Where there is a role requirement ensuring that you have a current DBS certificate
- Always wearing your uniform when engaged in work with Essex Outdoors
- Ensuring you follow the policy on the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Each centre will appoint a **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)** and **Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL)**.

The **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)** is responsible for managing child/vulnerable adult protection referrals, implementing safeguarding training, and raising awareness of child protection/vulnerable adult policies and procedures. They will also ensure that everyone in the Centre (including

temporary staff, volunteers and contractors) are aware of these procedures and that they are always followed and will work with the local authority and other agencies as required.

The **Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL)** has delegated responsibility for managing child/vulnerable adult protection referrals, implementing safeguarding training, and raising awareness of child protection/vulnerable adult policies and procedures.

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

What are professional boundaries?

Professional boundaries are a set of guidelines, expectations and rules which set the standards for how you must undertake your work for Essex Outdoors. It means understanding what you have been asked to do and not working outside the scope of that activity.

Why are professional boundaries important?

We use professional boundaries to protect everyone and ensure that our customers are always treated with respect and dignity and protected from harm – especially because we are often working with those who are vulnerable. This means that we have a responsibility to them to do things to the best of our ability.

Professional boundaries apply to all forms of communication and contact, including any use of social media.

What responsibilities do I have?

You must follow these guidelines to ensure you provide safe and effective services to our customers. Seek advice from your line manager if you are unsure of anything

To help you understand more, here are some do and don'ts. Follow these instructions in all communication and contact you may have with our customers.

Do

- Do keep the details of your work with people confidential
- Do understand the limits of your skillset and not work beyond them
- Do always complete your assigned task to the best of your ability and ensure that what you do does not harm the person you are supporting
- Do treat everyone with dignity and respect
- Do treat everyone as an individual
- Do let go of any assumptions you may have about any groups of people
- Do use clear and appropriate language to ensure no misunderstanding when speaking with people
- Do always complete any paperwork related to your role
- Do manage your own emotions

- Do ensure you pass on any concerns to the designated safeguarding lead
- Alert the senior management if you become aware of any actions or behaviours within your place of work you feel are negligent, dangerous, abusive, dishonest or in any other way unsuitable so that things can change.

Don't

- Don't undertake activities outside those you have been instructed to carry out by senior staff
- Don't discriminate against people for any reason including race, sex, gender reassignment, age, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, appearance or cultural background, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity
- Don't share personal information about yourself (this includes personal contact details such as personal telephone numbers, email addresses, social media details etc)
- Don't disclose information about your personal life to our customers
- Don't encourage customers to see you as a friend
- Don't hold other relationships with our customers whilst you are working with them.

SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Essex Outdoors will use its safeguarding policy and procedures to:

- Share and report all safeguarding concerns to the relevant internal staff and external authorities swiftly and appropriately.
- Share and manage any allegations of safeguarding concerns about staff or volunteers against a child/ren using the Local Authority Designated Officer process.
- Develop a culture that enables issues about safeguarding and promoting welfare to be addressed, and for everyone who works for Essex Outdoors to feel able to raise concerns and feel supported in fulfilling their safeguarding role.

Protection from Abuse

Essex Outdoors recognises that all children and adults at risk whatever their age, ability, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious belief and/or sexual identity have equal rights to protection from abuse.

We will ensure all the organisation's operations and activities are designed and delivered with effective safeguarding in mind to protect adults and children from abuse.

Digital Safeguarding

Essex Outdoors recognises the need to protect children and adults at risk of harm from safeguarding harm both in person and/or from cyber/ virtual risks.

Everyone that works for Essex Outdoors will be aware of the importance of maintaining professional boundaries, including in the use of social media.

Training

We will provide effective management, induction training, regular refresher training and support for everyone working for Essex Outdoors relevant to the role that they are appointed to, as detailed in Appendix 2.

We will ensure everyone working for Essex Outdoors knows about and follows our safeguarding policy, which will include a commitment that no staff member should ever inflict physical or psychological harm

on a child, plus information on appropriate relationships and the use of social media.

Training and qualifications relevant to safeguarding will be recorded on our management information system(S), with the relevant expiry date added to ensure training is current.

Recruitment and appointments

Essex Outdoors will ensure everyone working for us will act with appropriate professional behaviour. Failure to maintain standards may be dealt with using our Disciplinary Procedures.

All relevant staff will be DBS checked, with those in 'regulated activity' subject to an enhanced check, plus a check of the relevant barred list(s). Further checks will include ensuring that applicants have the right skill set, proof of identity and the right to work in the UK. Details of previous experience and references will also be requested and checked.

Recording of Safeguarding Information

Essex Outdoors will record, store and use information professionally and securely, in line with data protection legislation and guidance and ECC IT policies and procedures.

Health & Safety

Essex Outdoors will ensure reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that staff and

customers are kept safe when using its centre(s). Risk assessments are carried out for all activities in accordance with the law and/or Essex County Council requirements.

Visitors and contractors

Essex Outdoors will ensure that all visitors, including contractors are signed in to the centre. This applies to everyone not recorded on a group attendance register.

All visitors and contractors will need to be supervised while on site, unless they have a suitable DBS check in place. All visitors must wear a suitable form of identification, whether an Essex Outdoors visitors badge or an ECC/Mitie ID card.

Where sites have public rights of way, members of the public only have access to these areas as identified on Ordnance Survey Maps. Trespassers will be actively challenged by Essex Outdoors staff and asked to leave the site.

Missing Child

If you discover that a child is missing, and you're not the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) you should alert the DSL or a senior staff member. The DSL or senior staff member should search the Essex Outdoors site where the child has gone missing.

Depending on the child's age, if there is no sign of the child, then you should contact their parents or carer to establish whether they have returned home.

Once the DSL has completed these checks, if the child is still missing you should discuss with the parents or carer whether it is appropriate to contact the police. In most cases, parents and carers know the child best and will be able to assess whether their child is likely to return of their own accord or whether there are significant concerns for their safety.

The parents or carer are responsible for contacting the police. You can contact the police on their behalf if they agree.

If you or the parents contact the police, wait for them to arrive and follow their instructions. The DSL or senior staff member must continue to search while waiting for the police to arrive.

If the parents do not want to contact the police, only contact them if you consider the parent's decision to be unreasonable and the child is at significant risk of harm.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Essex Outdoors recognises that children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), or certain medical or physical health conditions, may face additional safeguarding challenges both online and offline. These challenges can make them more vulnerable to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and harm.

Children with SEND may experience:

- Behavioural changes, mood swings, or injuries may be wrongly attributed to their condition without further exploration.
- Increased risk of isolation or bullying, including prejudice-based bullying, peer exclusion, and social marginalisation.
- Children with SEND may be more deeply affected by harmful behaviours, even if they do not outwardly show signs.
- Difficulties in expressing concerns, understanding safeguarding risks, or reporting abuse.
- Challenges in distinguishing between safe and unsafe behaviours, particularly online, and understanding the consequences of actions.

LGBTQ+

Essex Outdoors recognises that LGBTQ+ people can be more vulnerable to negative experiences or interactions. We will ensure that our service is inclusive to everyone, regardless of their age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion, belief, sex or sexual orientation.

Prevent

The Prevent Duty (Section 26 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015) places a duty on schools and childcare providers to 'have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'. This duty covers several areas

such as staff training, partnership working and communications.

Staff should therefore report any concerns regarding radicalisation or involvement in terrorism to their line manager (or the Designated Safeguarding Lead or their deputy) in the usual way.

We will manage the risks of extremist or terrorist abuse: not supporting or enabling terrorism or other illegal conduct, such as hatred on the grounds of race, religion or sexual orientation.

Furthermore, Essex Outdoors has a responsibility to ensure that its facilities are not exploited by radicalisers. This includes a statement within our Terms & Conditions that makes it clear to the hirer that our facilities are not to be used by any groups or speakers in support of any extremist ideology.

For more information, please refer to the Prevent Awareness PDF below.



Trauma Informed Approach

Essex Outdoors staff should be aware that trauma, racism, discrimination, and past experiences with services affect how people may interact with us. Where possible, we will adapt our practice accordingly.

Use of mobile phones

We acknowledge that mobile phones are often the only means of contact available and can be helpful in supporting emergency procedures.

We will ensure that personal mobiles:

- Are on silent whilst staff are on duty
- Are not used to take pictures of any children attending Essex Outdoors Centres
- Are not used to contact parents / carers of children except in the event of an emergency
- Are not used by visitors

Use of cameras, photography and images

Most people who take or view photographs or videos of children do so for acceptable reasons. However, due to cases of abuse to children through taking or using images, we must ensure that we have safeguards in place.

To keep our children safe, we will:

- always obtain consent from parents / carers for photographs or video recordings to be taken, used, or published (for example, on our website or displays)
- ensure that children's names are not displayed alongside any photographs in a public space
- ensure that all images are stored securely

- Ensure where professional photographers are used that the appropriate checks, such as those with the Disclosure and Barring Service, references and parental consent are obtained prior to photographs being taken.
- Ensure that group leaders are only taking images of their group, and not other groups that may also be at an Essex Outdoors centre.

RECOGNISING ABUSE, HARM AND VULNERABILITIES

Abuse is a form of maltreatment. It is the violation of an individual's human and civil rights, usually for gratification.

Abuse can be self-inflicted or inflicted by another person or persons. In the context of safeguarding, it is used to refer to any knowing, intentional or negligent act by another that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to another.

Any form of abuse is usually perpetrated as the result of deliberate intent. However vulnerable people can also be harmed, damaged or distressed by acts of neglect or ignorance.

Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse.

Abusers are usually known to their victims and are trusted by them or dependant on them. An abuser will make every effort to establish trust and will seek to maintain the respect of friends and colleagues alike.

Contrary to commonly held belief, strangers very seldom abuse because without having gained trust they cannot be confident that their victims will not tell.

- Abuse may consist of single, multiple or repeated acts, either to one person in a continuing relationship or service context, or to more than one person at a time

- Abuse can occur in any relationship and may result in significant harm to, or exploitation of, the person subjected to it. It may result in death

Types of Abuse, Harm and Vulnerabilities

Adverse childhood experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) are highly stressful and/or traumatic, events or situations which occurred during childhood and/or adolescence.

They can be a single event or a prolonged series of events which threaten a young person's safety, security, trust or bodily integrity. Examples of ACE include:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- emotional abuse
- living with someone who abuses drugs
- living with someone who abuses alcohol
- exposure to domestic violence
- living with someone who has been to prison
- living with someone with serious mental illness
- losing a parent through divorce, death or abandonment.

Experiencing ACEs can have an impact on future physical and mental health, and ACEs can be barrier to forming healthy relationships in the future.

Breast ironing

Breast ironing – also known as breast flattening – is the process whereby young pubescent girls' breasts are ironed, massaged and/or pounded down through the use of hard or heated objects in order for the breasts to disappear or to delay the development of the breasts entirely

It is believed that by carrying out this act, young girls will be protected from harassment, rape, abduction and early forced marriage and therefore be kept in education. Much like female genital mutilation (FGM), breast ironing is a harmful cultural practice and is child abuse.

Bullying

Bullying is any behaviour that is: threatening, aggressive, intimidating abusive, insulting, offensive, cruel, vindictive humiliating, degrading or demeaning.

Bullying can occur between children, adults or between adults and children. Bullying can take many forms. It can be physical, verbal or non-verbal. Mobile phones, the internet or instant messaging can be used to bully.

Whatever form the bullying takes, many who are bullied will not tell anyone.

- Bullying can be inflicted by anybody whether as an individual or in a group

- It often occurs in circumstances where it is difficult for the bullied to defend themselves
- Bullies will usually pick on those they consider to be vulnerable and less able to protect themselves, such as those who are younger, different or disadvantaged in some way
- Some individuals may be picked on because of race, class, religion, gender, sexuality, disability or appearance
- Others are bullied for no obvious reason
- It can leave those bullied feeling lonely, isolated and very unhappy
- Some children and adults have taken their own lives when bullying became too much to bear
- Bullying has an effect on everyone, not just those directly involved. Some feel they can only stand on the side lines and do nothing, because if they intervene, they run the risk of being bullied themselves
- Bullying causes much fear and misery and should never be taken lightly.

Child-on-child (peer-on-peer) abuse

Children can abuse other children. It can take many forms including bullying; sexual violence or harassment; and physical abuse.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur online and offline. Evidence shows that girls, children with special education and needs disabilities (SEND) and LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer

and other) children are at greater risk. Child-on-child abuse tends to be experienced by children aged 10 and upwards, with those abusing them being slightly older.

Signs of possible child-on-child abuse include but are not limited to:

- physical injuries
- drug and alcohol abuse
- going missing
- committing criminal offences
- disengagement from school
- poor mental health
- sexual health concerns.

Criminal exploitation – County Lines

Criminal exploitation is a criminal activity whereby an individual or group manipulates, coerces, or controls a person (usually a child or vulnerable adult) into engaging in criminal activity for the exploiter's benefit or gain.

In County Lines, this often involves coercing young or vulnerable people into transporting and/or selling drugs, often in remote geographical locations such as seaside towns.

It can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and is often accompanied by violence or threat of violence. It can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and young people or adults.

Going missing from home or care is a key indicator of county lines-related child exploitation. It is also important to

recognise the links between child sexual exploitation (CSE), missing children and county lines. Grooming may have been occurring over a sustained period

Drug, alcohol and substance misuse

Misuse is defined as a pattern of habitually taking any substance which can cause harm for mood-altering purposes. Substances which can be identified as causing harm may be legal or illegal.

Signs of possible drug, alcohol and substance misuse include but are not limited to:

- unexplained change in personality or attitude
- sudden mood swings, irritability or angry outbursts
- lack of motivation, lethargy or appearing 'spaced out' confusion
- unexplained shortage of money
- fraud, theft
- unexplained weight loss/gain.

Discriminatory abuse

Discriminatory abuse is when someone picks on a person because something about them is different. This can include unfair or less favourable treatment due to a person's race, sex, gender reassignment, age, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, appearance or cultural background, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity

Signs of possible discriminatory abuse include but are not limited to:

- harassment
- offensive materials or graffiti
- verbal abuse, gestures or statements which are unwelcome and intended as insults
- threatening or obscene behaviour
- jokes of a derogatory nature
- bullying, offensive language or violence
- excluding or treating differently
- preventing contact with particular individuals.

Domestic violence and abuse

Domestic abuse is any incident (or pattern of incidents) of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members

The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically. Just one encounter counts as abuse, and it is often an ongoing pattern of behaviour. However, the one constant element of domestic abuse is the abuser's consistent efforts to maintain power and control over the victim.

Domestic abuse can affect anyone regardless of ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality or social background. If you are suffering from physical, sexual, psychological or financial abuse, or are being threatened, intimidated or stalked by

a current or previous partner or close family member, it's likely you're a victim of domestic abuse.

Victims may be feeling frightened, isolated, ashamed or confused. If they have children, it may be that they too are suffering, whether or not they are the targets of or witnesses to the abuse. Remember, victims are not to blame for what is happening. They need to know that they are not alone, and above all do not have to suffer in silence – help is available to report and deal with domestic abuse.

Controlling behaviour

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts performed by the abuser and designed to make their victim subordinate and/or dependent. These acts include but are not limited to:

- isolating the victim from sources of support
- exploiting the victim's resources and capacities for personal gain
- depriving the victim of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape
- regulating the victim's everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used by the abuser to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. There are 11 things that are

illegal for a person to do to their partner, which are to:

- share sexually explicit images of them
- restrict their access to money
- repeatedly put them down
- stop them seeing friends or family
- scare them
- threaten to reveal private things about them
- put tracking devices on them or their phones
- allow jealousy to lead to violence
- make them obey their rules
- control what they wear
- force them to do things they don't want to.

Emotional or psychological abuse

Emotional or psychological abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a person that adversely affects their wellbeing or development. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill treatment, though it may occur alone

Signs of possible emotional or psychological abuse include but are not limited to:

- delayed physical or emotional development or sudden speech disorders
- compulsive nervous behaviour, eg. highly anxious or obsessive behaviour
- excessive deference, need for approval, attention or affection reluctance to have parents/carers contacted

- fear in the eyes, avoiding looking at individuals, flinching on approach
- ambivalence towards individuals
- low self-esteem
- unexplained fear or defensiveness
- threatening or aggressive behaviour.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation (sometimes known as female circumcision or referred to as cutting) refers to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The practice is illegal in the UK. It is also illegal to take a female out of the country to do this.

FGM is usually carried out on females before puberty. The procedure is traditionally carried out by a woman with no medical training. Anaesthetics and antiseptic treatments are not generally used, and the practice is usually carried out using knives, scissors, scalpels, pieces of glass or razor blades. Females may have to be forcibly restrained.

Signs of possible recent abuse include but are not limited to:

- severe pain
- shock
- bleeding
- wound infections
- inability to urinate
- injury to vulvar tissues surrounding the entrance to the vagina

- damage to other organs nearby, such as the urethra (where urine passes) and the bowel burning.

Signs of possible past abuse include:

- chronic vaginal and pelvic infections
- abnormal periods
- difficulty passing urine, and persistent urine infections
- cysts and the formation of scar tissue
- complications in pregnancy and newborn deaths
- psychological damage, including low libido, depression and anxiety.
- disproportionate affection for an adult at risk of harm with money or property
- recent changes to their legal documents

Grooming

Grooming is the planned and deliberate act of manoeuvring another individual into a position that makes them more isolated. They become dependent and likely to trust the abuser, and more vulnerable to abusive behaviour.

Grooming occurs when someone builds an emotional connection with a child or adult at risk of harm to gain their trust for the purposes of abuse or exploitation. They can be groomed online or in person, by a stranger or by someone they know – for example a family member, friend or professional. Groomers can be male or female. They can be any age.

The internet has created new opportunities for abusers to target the vulnerable. They

do this by taking advantage of an unsuspecting individual and then proceed to groom. Because the internet is largely unregulated, it has become a significant tool for manipulation in the hands of an abuser.

Caring and concerned adults may also be groomed by the abuser, winning their trust, and as a result a situation which should cause concern becomes acceptable.

- Those affected may not realise they have been groomed, or that what has happened is abuse and abusers will try to overcome a child or an adult's natural resistance in stages by: making and sustaining contact
- offering gifts or rewards as bribes
- using secrecy and possible threats so that they become isolated
- introducing them to abuse that appears natural.

Mental health

Around one in four people in the UK experience a mental health problem each year, according to Mind, the mental health charity. There are many different mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, phobias and eating disorders. Help is available but too many people go without the vital support they need to feel better.

Everyone has good and bad days. However, feeling stressed or low for a long time can be a sign of a mental health

problem. There are some common signs that people may need some extra support such as:

- frequently experiencing problems falling asleep or regularly waking up very early
- persistent headaches, palpitations and nausea

Modern slavery (human trafficking)

Modern slavery includes forced labour, domestic servitude or coercing, deceiving and forcing an individual into a life of abuse.

Signs of possible modern slavery include but are not limited to:

- physical appearance
- isolation
- poor living conditions
- few or no personal effects
- restricted freedom of movement
- unusual travel times
- reluctance to seek help
- people who rarely come out of the house and speak little or no English
- faces that can be seen at windows often looking stressed and never smiling
- house or flat curtains closed during much of the day
- excessive packaging of home delivery meals left outside a house
- frequent visitors to residential premises
- places where 'workers' appear underage or speak no or little English

- children collected at the school gate by different people each day who are clearly not the parents or grandparents.

Neglect and acts of omission

Neglect is the continuing failure to prevent harm that damages or impairs health and/or development by not meeting a person's basic physical and/or psychological needs

Signs of possible neglect include but are not limited to:

- poor health
- being constantly hungry or thirsty
- loss of weight or being constantly underweight
- being tired all the time
- lack of personal care; inadequate or inappropriate clothing
- being dressed inappropriately for the weather, unkempt, dirty or smelly
- untreated medical conditions
- injuries that have not been treated or have been treated inadequately
- lack of respect for their privacy or dignity
- disturbing thoughts, emotions and memories
- poor physical health
- struggling with parenting or relationships.

Online abuse

Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the web, whether through

social networks, playing online games or using mobile phones. Children and young people may experience cyberbullying, grooming, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or emotional abuse. It can take place anywhere and anytime.

Children can be at risk of online abuse from people they know, as well as from strangers. Online abuse may be part of abuse that is taking place in the real world (for example bullying or grooming). Or it may be that the abuse only happens online (for example persuading children to take part in sexual activity online).

Children can feel like there is no escape from online abuse – abusers can contact them at any time of the day or night, the abuse can come into safe places like their bedrooms, and images and videos can be stored and shared with other people.

Online abuse can include:

Online bullying or cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is an increasingly common form of bullying behaviour which happens on social networks, games, and mobile phones. Cyberbullying can include spreading rumours about someone, or posting nasty or embarrassing messages, images, or videos.

Cyberbullying includes:

- sending threatening or abusive text messages creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos

- ‘trolling’ – sending menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games
- excluding children from online games, activities or friendship groups
- setting up hate sites or groups about a particular child
- encouraging young people to self-harm
- voting for or against someone in an abusive poll
- creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass a young person or cause trouble using their name
- sending explicit messages, also known as sexting
- pressuring children into sending sexual images or engaging in sexual conversations.

Online grooming

Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or trafficking. Groomers can use social media sites, instant messaging apps including teen dating apps, or online gaming platforms to connect with a young person or child. They can spend time learning about a young person’s interests from their online profiles and then use this knowledge to help them build up a relationship. It’s easy for groomers to hide their identity online – they may pretend to be a child and

then chat and become ‘friends’ with children they are targeting. Groomers no longer need to meet children in real life to abuse them. Increasingly, groomers are sexually exploiting their victims by persuading them to take part in online sexual activity.

Online child sexual abuse

When sexual exploitation happens online, young people may be persuaded, or forced, to:

- send or post sexually explicit images of themselves
- take part in sexual activities via a webcam or smartphone
- have sexual conversations by text or online.

Abusers may threaten to send images, video or copies of conversations to the young person’s friends and family unless they take part in other sexual activity. Images or videos may continue to be shared long after the sexual abuse has stopped.

Sexting

Sexting is when someone shares sexual, naked or semi-naked images or videos of themselves or others, or sends sexually-explicit messages. They can be sent using mobiles, tablets, smartphones, laptops etc – any device that allows you to share media and messages. Sexting may also be called ‘trading nudes’, ‘dirties’ or ‘pic for pic’. The creating or sharing of explicit

images of a child is illegal, even if the person doing it is a child.

It is important to note that where children and vulnerable adults experience harm online, this often overlaps with harm experienced in person.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is an individual’s body being injured or hurt due, for example to assault, hitting, slapping or pushing. Physical abuse can take many forms and the actions taken are intentionally hurtful and harmful.

Signs of possible physical abuse include but are not limited to:

- any injury which is not fully explained or inconsistent with the account given
- unexplained bruises or welts on face, lips, mouth, body, arms, back, buttocks or thighs
- bite marks
- bruises in various stages of healing
- clusters of bruises forming regular patterns, reflecting the shape of an object or fingers
- unexplained burns, especially on soles of feet, palms and back; immersion burns, scalds, rope marks, electrical appliance or carpet burns
- cigarette burns
- unexplained fractures to any part of the body, especially in various stages of healing; multiple or spinal injuries

- unexplained lacerations or abrasions to mouth, lips, gums, eyes or external genitalia
- avoidance of physical contact
- malnutrition, rapid or continued weight loss, insufficient food on premises, dehydration, complaints of hunger
- incontinence
- loss of physical functions due to misuse of medication
- restriction of freedom of movement.

Radicalisation

Radicalisation is defined as the process by which those who are vulnerable come to support terrorism or violent extremism and, in some cases, to directly participate in or support terrorist groups.

The process of radicalisation is different for every individual and can take place over an extended period or within a very short time frame. It may follow experience of racism or discrimination. They believe that joining a movement offers social and psychological rewards such as adventure, camaraderie and a heightened sense of identity.

Signs of possible radicalisation include but are not limited to:

- changes in behaviour
- sense of isolation or failure
- expression of extremist views
- use of inappropriate language – racist or hate terms
- supporting violent methods and actions

- accessing extremist material online, including through networking sites (eg. Facebook, YouTube)
- travel for extended periods to international locations known to be associated with extremism

Self-harm

Self-harm is the act of deliberately causing harm to oneself either by causing a physical injury or by putting oneself in dangerous situations.

Self-harm is primarily a coping strategy and can provide a release from emotional distress and enable an individual to regain feelings of control. There is no typical person who self-harms. It can be anyone. Signs of possible self-harm include but are not limited to:

- covering up cut marks with clothing
- frequent thoughts of helplessness, hopelessness or worthlessness
- shame, guilt, low self-esteem
- unexplained injuries
- fear
- depression
- loss of sleep
- unexplained weight loss or gain
- confusion
- unexpected or unexplained change in behaviour
- feeling guilty

Self-neglect

Self-neglect is neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings and includes behaviour such as hoarding.

Possible signs indicating self-neglect can be found under Neglect and acts of omission in this section

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is the involvement of the person in sexual activities which they do not want or truly understand, or to which they are unable to give valid or effective consent. This may involve rape, sexual assault, inappropriate sexual contact or exposure to inappropriate material.

Signs of possible sexual abuse include but are not limited to:

- significant change in sexual behaviour, language or outlook
- overtly sexual behaviour, often inappropriate to age or development
- bruising or other injuries on areas of the body normally covered – for this reason, they may only be noticed during activities such as swimming
- torn or stained underwear
- pain or itching, bruises or bleeding in genital or anal area
- stomach pains or discomfort when walking or sitting
- sexually transmitted, urinary tract or vaginal infections
- pregnancy in a person who lacks capacity or who is very young

- self-inflicted injury or attempted suicide.

Sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation is a type of sexual abuse in which children or adults at risk of harm are sexually exploited for money, power or status.

Some children and adults at risk of harm are trafficked into or within the UK for this purpose. They may be tricked into believing they are in a loving, consensual relationship.

Abusers will use various means to gain compliance such as drugs, alcohol, gifts, threats and bribes.

Signs of possible sexual exploitation include but are not limited to:

- being missing from home or care
- physical injuries
- drug or alcohol misuse
- involvement in offending
- repeated sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and terminations
- absence from school
- change in physical appearance
- being estranged from their family
- inappropriate use of social networking sites and other media devices
- receipt of gifts from unknown sources
- recruiting others into exploitative situations
- poor mental health
- self-harm
- thoughts of or attempts at suicide.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment means ‘unwanted conduct of a sexual nature’ and can occur online and offline.

Such harassment is likely to violate a person’s dignity, make them feel intimidated, degraded or create a hostile, offensive or sexualised environment. It can include sexual comments, jokes or taunting, physical behaviour and consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude or semi-nude images or videos.

REPORTING A CONCERN

Any member of staff or visitor to the Centre who receives a disclosure or allegation of abuse, or suspects that abuse may have occurred, **must** report it immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or, in their absence, the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead).

When receiving a disclosure, people who work for Essex Outdoors **must**:

- Remain calm, approachable and receptive
- Listen carefully without interrupting
- Make it clear that you are taking what is being said seriously
- Acknowledge you understand how difficult this may be
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling you
- Let them know that you will do everything you can to help them
- Record carefully using the words of the child or adult at risk of harm and sign, date and time your notes
- Record only what has been said, heard, seen and what you have done
- Inform the person making the report that you need to share this information with the appropriate person
- Only share information with people that need to know.

You must not

- Probe or investigate it yourself, only listen and record.
- Ask leading questions
- Speculate or make assumptions
- Make any comments about the people involved
- Make any promises you cannot keep
- Delay passing this information to the designated safeguarding lead

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will decide on an appropriate escalation route for the concern, selecting an appropriate consultation opportunity and recording any outcome.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead or their deputy will immediately refer cases of suspected abuse or allegations to the Family Operations Hub by telephone (appendix 1) and in accordance with the procedures outlined in the [SET procedures \(ESCB, 2025\)](#) and in 'Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex' (ESCB, 2024).

The contact details at the end of this document will be displayed in each centre to ensure that all staff have access to safeguarding support.

IF A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER, CALL THE POLICE ON 999.

Essential information will include the person's name, address, date of birth,

family composition, the reason for the referral, whether the child's parents are aware of the referral plus any other relevant information or advice given.

Allegations about members of the workforce

Allegations concerning staff or volunteers must be referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). LADO give advice and guidance on how concerns or allegations about adults working with children should be investigated. The LADO should be contacted if you have concerns or receive a complaint or allegation that a worker/volunteer has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates he or she may pose a risk of harm to children; or
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children

There are four LADOs for Essex County Council and they are based within the Children's Safeguarding Team. They should be contacted by e-mail: lado@essex.gov.uk, within one working day. Or by phone on **03330 139 797** if immediate safeguarding is required.

Any referral should be followed up with a referral form. This can be accessed via the [Essex Safeguarding Children Board website](#).

If a concern is raised outside of office hours, and an immediate referral to Social Care is required, this should be made to Essex Social care on 0345 603 7627.

The LADO should then be informed at the first available opportunity.

Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing is ‘making a disclosure in the public interest’ and occurs when a worker (or member of the wider Centre community) raises a concern about danger or illegality that affects others, for example children visiting the Centre or members of the public.

All staff are made aware of the duty to raise concerns about the attitude or actions of staff in line with Essex County Council’s Code of Conduct / Whistleblowing policy.

We want everyone to feel able to report any child protection / safeguarding concerns. However, for members of staff who feel unable to raise these concerns internally, they can call the NSPCC whistleblowing helpline on: 0800 028 0285 (line is available from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM, Monday to Friday) or [email](#):

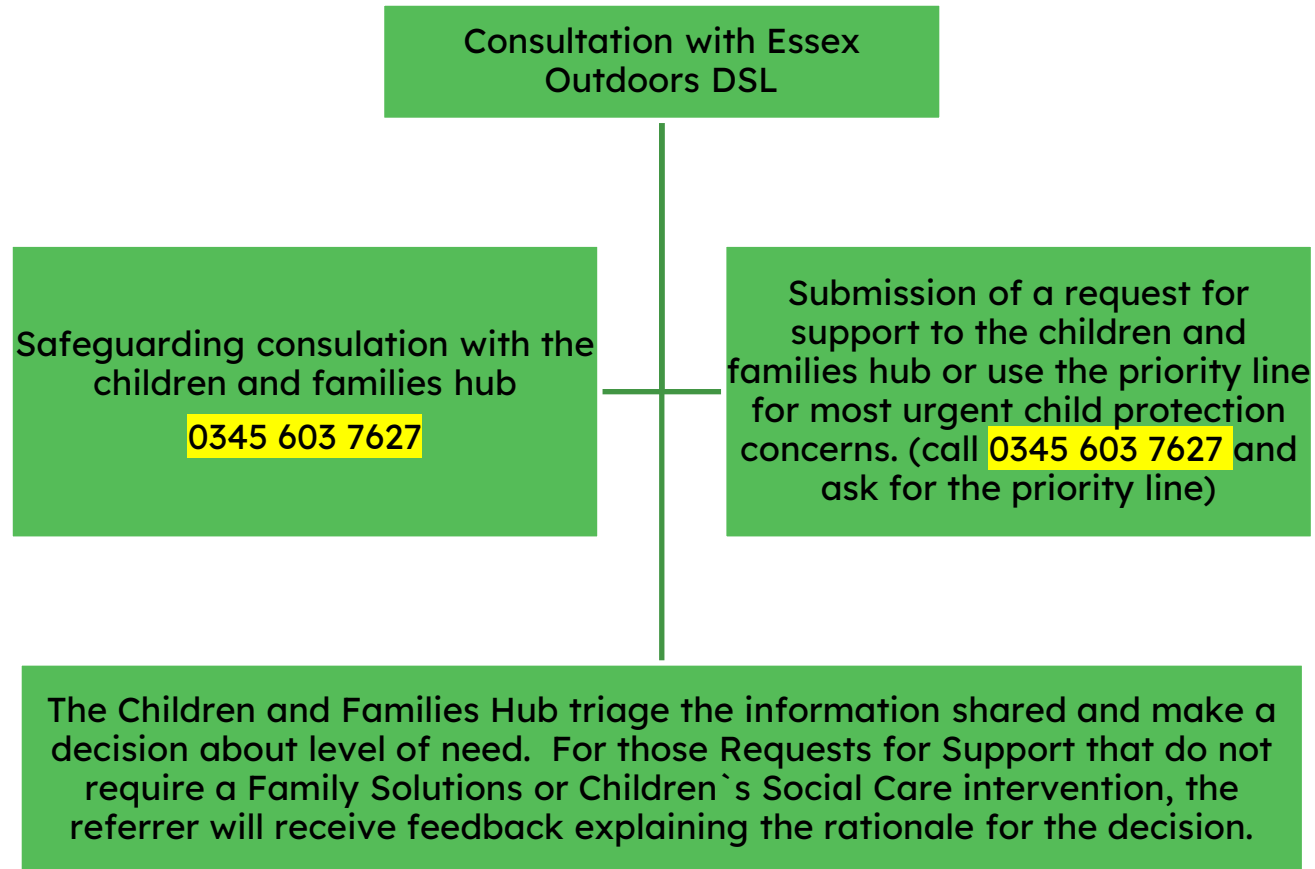
Sharing information

The [2024 Information sharing guidance for safeguarding practitioners](#) contains seven golden rules for sharing information.

1. All children have a right to be protected from abuse and neglect. Protecting a child from such harm takes priority over protecting their privacy, or the privacy rights of the person(s) failing to protect them.
2. When you have a safeguarding concern, wherever it is practicable and safe to do so, engage with the child and/or their carer(s), and explain who you intend to share information with, what information you will be sharing and why. You are not required to inform them, if you have reason to believe that doing so may put the child at increased risk of harm.
3. You do not need consent to share personal information about a child and/or members of their family if a child is at risk or there is a perceived risk of harm. You need a lawful basis to share information under data protection law, but when you intend to share information as part of action to safeguard a child at possible risk of harm, consent may not be an appropriate basis for sharing.
4. Seek advice promptly whenever you are uncertain or do not fully understand how the legal framework

- supports information sharing in a particular case. Do not leave a child at risk of harm because you have concerns you might be criticised for sharing information. Instead, find out who in your organisation/agency can provide advice about what information to share and with whom. This may be your manager/supervisor, the designated safeguarding children professional, the data protection/information governance Lead.
5. When sharing information, ensure you and the person or agency/organisation that receives the information take steps to protect the identities of any individuals (e.g., the child, a carer, a neighbour, or a colleague) who might suffer harm if their details became known to an abuser or one of their associates.
 6. Only share relevant and accurate information with individuals or agencies/organisations that have a role in safeguarding the child and/or providing their family with support and only share the information they need to support the provision of their services.
 7. Record the reasons for your information sharing decision, irrespective of whether or not you decide to share information.

APPENDIX 1 – CHILDREN AND FAMILIES HUB ACCESS MAP



If a child or young person is in immediate danger, call the Police on 999.

APPENDIX 2 – MINIMUM TRAINING MATRIX FOR THOSE WORKING FOR ESSEX OUTDOORS

Role	Safeguarding Induction	Annual Safeguarding refresher	Safeguarding Level 1 (Renew Annually)	Safeguarding Level 2 (Renew 2 years)	Safeguarding Level 3 (Renew 3 years)	PREVENT Training	Safer Recruitment
Essex Outdoors Manager (DSL)	Y	Y	N/A	N/A	Y	Y	Y
Assistant Manager (DDSL)	Y	Y	N/A	N/A	Y	Y	Y
Senior Instructor	Y	Y	N/A	Y	N/A	Y	N/A
Lead Instructor	Y	Y	N/A	Y	N/A	Y	N/A
Education Ranger / Environmental Instructor	Y	Y	N/A	Y	N/A	Y	N/A
Customer Service Lead	Y	Y	Y	N/A	N/A	Y	N/A
Catering Lead	Y	Y	Y	N/A	N/A	Y	N/A
Facilities Lead	Y	Y	Y	N/A	N/A	Y	N/A
All other personnel	Y	Y	Y	N/A	N/A	Y	N/A

APPENDIX 3 – CONTACT DETAILS FOR DESIGNATED SAFEGUARDING LEADS

Centre	Designated Safeguarding Lead	Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead
Bradwell	Meyrick Wilkie Meyrick.wilkie@essex.gov.uk 01621 776256	
Danbury	Paul Stokes Paul.stokes@essex.gov.uk 01245 223342	Mac McConnell Neil.Mcconnell@essex.gov.uk 01245 223342
Harlow	James Harris James.harris2@essex.gov.uk 01279 620270	Collette Bailey Collette.bailey@essex.gov.uk 01279 620270
Mersea	Andrew Windridge Andrew.windridge@essex.gov.uk 01206 383226	Russell Belcher Russell.belcher@essex.gov.uk 01206 383226
Education Rangers	Paul Stokes Paul.stokes@essex.gov.uk 01245 223342	