Cumberland Safeguarding Children Partnership

Cumberland Threshold Guidance

Meeting the Needs of Children and Families

Cumberland Council

Cumbria Constabulary

NHS North East & North Cumbria

Introduction

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026) explains that Safeguarding Partners must publish a Threshold Document, which sets out the local criteria for action in a way that is transparent, evidence-based, accessible, and easily understood.

In Cumberland, the Safeguarding Partners are known as Cumberland Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP).

This document outlines how practitioners and services work together across Cumberland to provide the right help, at the right time, through a continuum of need and response.

It reflects the Families First for Children approach, promoting:

- Community based interventions as the primary offer of early support.
- A whole family, strengths-based approach.
- Multi-agency, child-centred practice.
- Timely safeguarding responses where harm or significant harm is identified.

This guidance supports practitioners to make consistent, evidence-informed decisions about how best to support children, young people and their families, ensuring their safety, wellbeing and outcomes are prioritised.

The Understanding of Levels of Need document is available on the CSCP Website: **Understanding the Level of Need and the Practice Response**

Using the guidance will support practitioners and managers to identify when a child may need support. The needs of children, young people and families should be considered on an individual basis, and responses should be based on sound assessment, professional judgment and, where appropriate, statutory guidance.

Through strength-based conversations it introduces a continuum of need and support, provides information on the levels of need and gives examples of some of the factors that may indicate that a child or young person needs additional support.

A Coordinated Approach - Safeguarding is Everyone's Responsibility

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

All practitioners and services working with children, young people and families must work together to identify needs early, share information appropriately, and provide coordinated support.

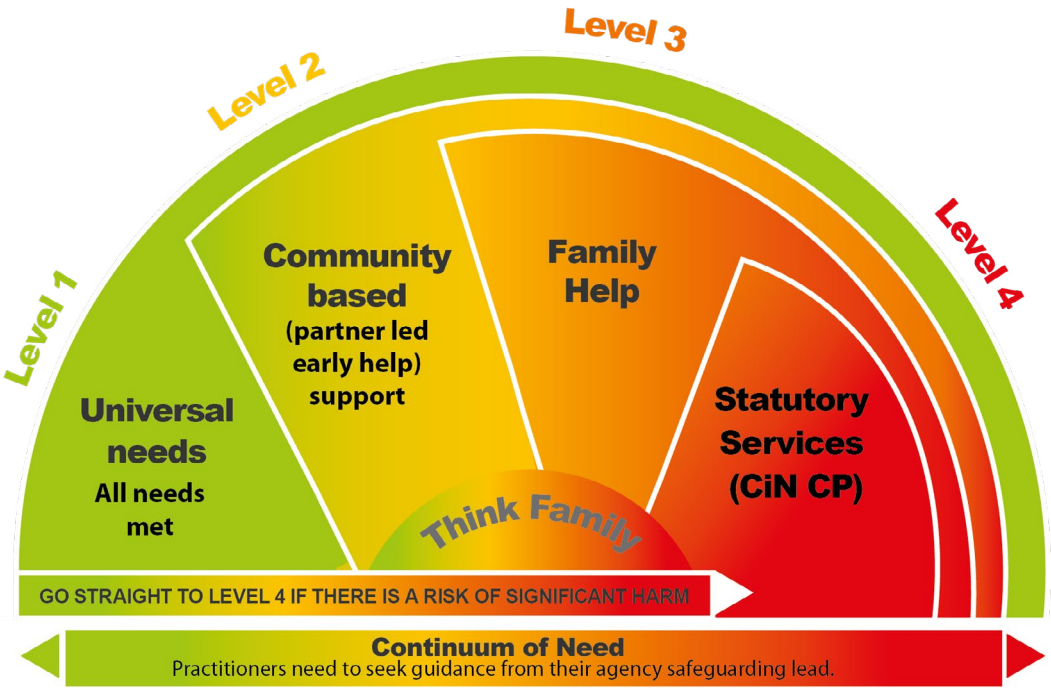
Practitioners should:

- Listen to, and ensure that, the voice and lived experience of the child remains central to decision making.
- Work with families using a strengths-based, relationship-focused approach.
- Engage families as partners, unless doing so would place a child at increased risk.

Effective safeguarding depends on timely, proportionate information sharing, as no single agency holds the full picture.

Family Help provides coordinated support when there are emerging needs, bringing together a multi-agency plan of help, alongside bringing together a Family Network to work in partnership.

Continuum of Need



Cumberland has developed a continuum of need, along with features that might be expected to be seen in families across the continuum. It is important to note that this does not represent a fixed definition of need; it should be used alongside professional judgement and form part of a wider discussion about how best to meet the needs of a specific child or family and support the consistency of response to children and young people.

The type of support that disabled children, young people and their families may need is potentially different from other families supported through Family Help, and their support offer should reflect this. They may require support throughout their childhood and across the continuum of need and access support from children's social care, education and health, often needing input from practitioners with specialist SEND expertise. Disabled children and their families can also face additional barriers to accessing help, such as multiple assessment pathways or practical challenges, which makes coordinated and streamlined support especially important. Practitioners must be alert to when disability is the primary need and take care to respond in a way that avoids stigmatising parents and carers while still ensuring children are safeguarded if appropriate.

What is a Special Educational Need (SEN) and/or a Disability?

Section 20 of the Children and Families Act 2014 states that SEN and/or a Disability is defined as:

1. A child or young person has SEN if s/he has a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for them.
2. A child or young person has a learning difficulty/disability if they:

- Have significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or
- Has a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream provision.

3. A child under compulsory school age has a learning difficulty or disability if they are likely to be within subsection (2) when of compulsory school age.
4. A child or young person does not have a learning difficulty or disability solely because of the language spoken.

In this guidance, we have identified four levels of need:

Level 1 Universal Needs - these are children who make good overall progress through an appropriate universal service. They have no additional unmet needs and there is a single need identified that has been, or can be, met by a universal service.

Level 2 Community Based (partner led early help) Support – these are children whose needs are emerging and cannot be met via a universal service and require additional support. This support will be coordinated by partners based within the community, eg schools, health professionals, voluntary and community sector. An Early Help Assessment will be initiated to identify the families support needs. A Team Around the Family will be developed and coordinated with an evidence based clear plan about actions to be taken. It is important that the Family Network is considered within the assessment.

Families could also access interventions from Cumberland's Family Hub Service at this level, for more information, please visit the Cumberland Family Hub website: **Homepage | Cumberland Family Hubs**

Level 3 Family Help - there is an increasing level of complex and/or multiple unmet needs, where coordinated support is required to prevent worries escalating. A multi-agency Assessment will be initiated by a Family Help Lead Practitioner within Cumberland Children's Social Care and, where appropriate, a multi-agency response will be developed. It is essential that the Family Network is considered within the assessment.

Level 4 Statutory Services (CiN/CP) – these are children who have suffered, or are likely to suffer, significant harm (Section 47) and where they are unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired without the provision of service, or a child who is disabled (Section 17). These children will require a response from Children's Social Care, and this may require a Multi-Agency Child Protection Team response.

When there is reason to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, a referral must be made to Cumberland Children Advice and Support Service (CCASS).

Moving Between the Levels

Children and young people can move across the levels of vulnerability according to their particular circumstances. The divisions between the levels should not be conceived as fixed rules, but rather guidelines to support decision making. The presence of a single or multiple combination of factors, the age of the child and protective factors will all need to be taken into account. Services need to be flexible to meet the need, as it changes.

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews have consistently shown that professionals have a tendency to use trigger incidents to reflect on the need for support or intervention. It is particularly important when considering the risk of harm from neglect and/or emotional abuse that professionals understand the cumulative impact on the child. A chronology is a critical component of building up a picture over time.

Practitioners should ask what they can do to help and support children they come into contact with, in order to ensure that their additional needs are identified. Practitioners will need to continue to contribute to multi-agency plans when needs become multiple and/or complex. All agencies should make reasonable adjustments to enable children, young people and their families to access services, as required by the Equality Act 2010.

Understanding the Level of Need and Practice Response

Understanding the Level of Need and Practices Response should be used alongside professional judgement and form part of a wider discussion about how best to meet the needs of a specific child or family and support the consistency of response to children and their families.

Community Based (Partner Led Early Help) Support

Early Help means providing support as soon as there are emerging needs, at any point in a child's life, from birth through to 19 years old (or 25 years old with SEND). Early Help relies on partners within the community to work together.

The Early Help Assessment (EHA) is coordinated by a lead practitioner, chosen by the family. This assessment will identify the family's strengths and the support the family feels is required. It is important that the Family Network is considered within this assessment.

The assessment should consider the whole family's needs, using the Think Family approach. It needs to respond to extra-familial worries posed to children and young people from outside of their home, either from adults or other young people.

At this level, SEND support should be considered within the assessment process.

Cumberland's Early Help Assessment can be found on the CSCP website: **Early Help Assessments (EHA) | Cumberland Safeguarding Children Partnership.**

Family Help

Family Help provides support and interventions to families, when there is an increasing level of complex and/or multiple unmet needs, where coordinated support is required to prevent worries escalating. This support is provided to families by Cumberland Children's Social Care. Family Help works with families to provide support and interventions when there is an increasing level of complex and/or multiple unmet needs, ensuring coordinated support to prevent worries escalating. This support is provided by Cumberland Children's Social Care.

An assessment can be initiated at this level and a multi-agency response will be developed. The emphasis is on assessing all aspects of a child or young person's strengths, needs and circumstances, developing a plan to meet their identified needs and reviewing progress systematically. It is essential that the Family Network is considered within the assessment.

At this level, SEND support should be considered within the assessment process.

If at any point during the assessment process the risk of harm is identified, a referral to the Cumberland Children Advice and Support Service (CCASS) should be made. Information on how to do this can be found on the CSCP website: **https://cumberlandsafeguardingchildren.co.uk/report-concern-about-child**

Early Help Professional Consultation

At any time when a family is being offered support and help from an agency, it is important that practitioners feel they can ask for help and advice and draw on the expertise of others.
All practitioners, services, schools and settings who work with families should feel able to consult with one another at any time before deciding on a course of action or way forward.

Early Help consultancy may:

- Be the first point of contact for advice and guidance after speaking to your own agency Designated Safeguarding Lead, when an agency is unclear if a referral needs to be made to the Cumberland Children Advice and Support Service.
- Advise if the child or family is already open to a Children and Families Service.
- Support others to complete an Early Help Assessment.
- Support Early Help Coordinators across the partnership, to understand and co-ordinate the Team Around the Family process.

If you have worries about a child and want an opportunity to talk these through to help decide the best course of action, please contact the Family Help Partnerships & Assurance Team to request a consultation: **Early Help - Contact, Consultancy, Advice and Guidance | Cumberland Safeguarding Children Partnership.**

Statutory Services (CiN,CP)

The Children Act 1989 sets out the Local Authority's duties to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting welfare.

These include children who are unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired without the provision of service, or a child who is disabled (Section 17 – Child in Need).

Under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, where a Local Authority has reasonable cause to suspect that a child (who lives or is found in their area) is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, has a duty to make such enquiries as it considers necessary, to decide whether to take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. Such enquiries, supported by other organisations and agencies, as appropriate, should be initiated where there are concerns about all forms of abuse and neglect.

Harm

Harm is anything that has a negative effect on a child's health, development, or wellbeing. This could be physical, emotional, or due to neglect. Harm does not always mean a child is in immediate danger, but it does mean they may need help or support to stop things from getting worse.

Significant Harm

Significant harm is when the impact on a child is serious enough that they are at risk of real and lasting impairment. This could be because of the severity of what is happening, how often it happens, or how it is affecting the child over time. At this point, services must take action to protect the child, not just offer support.

Summary

In summary, harm means there is a concern about a child's wellbeing. Significant harm means the child is at serious risk and needs protection.

Local Authorities undertake assessments of the needs of individual children and must give consideration to a child's age and understanding, when determining what, if any, services to provide.

There are requirements to consider the needs of children and young people where specific complexities have been identified. These are:

- Disabled children and carers.
- Young carers.
- Children in secure youth establishments.
- Children being privately fostered.
- 16/17 homeless children and young people.
- Children where threats exist from outside the home.

As noted in the Early Help section, it is important to respond to harm and abuse posed to children and young people from outside the home, either from adults or other young people. Extra familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the community and/or online.

These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including:

- Exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups, such as County Lines.
- Trafficking.
- Online abuse.
- Sexual exploitation.
- The influences of extremism leading to radicalization.

If practitioners identify children who are at risk of these threats, they must follow the CERAR process which can be found here: **https://cumbriascp.trixonline.co.uk/chapter/child-exploitation-including-child-sexual-exploitation-and-child-criminal-exploitation**

How We Work with Children and Families

Signs of Safety

The Cumberland Safeguarding Children Partnership has adopted the Signs of Safety practice approach which provides consistency of practice for all practitioners, and consistency of service for all children and families in Cumberland. Signs of Safety focuses on building strong working relationships with children, young people, families, and their networks, which empowers them to build effective solutions for change and take control of their own lives.

The Signs of Safety practice approach is supported by solution focus questioning, where children, young people and families are asked the right questions to enable them to understand some of the challenges they face, and for them to then come up with realistic solutions to improve things in the future.

The Signs of Safety assessment focuses on three main domains with seven analysis categories to begin to draw together and analyse information as it relates to the worries about the children:

1. What are we worried about? (Past Harm, Future Danger, Complicating Factors)
2. What's working well? (Existing Strengths, Existing Safety)
3. What needs to happen next? (Safety Goals, Next Steps).

Signs of Safety offers a range of tools and methods, so everyone has a clear focus on what needs to change, and what the behavioural changes will look like when we achieve our goals for safety or wellbeing. We measure success through changes in behaviours that support children to grow up within their own families and networks, where they have the potential to care for them safely.

The Signs of Safety core principles provide a framework for thinking and practice when working with all children and families:

1. Respect everyone you are working with as individuals
2. Engage the person and don't get lost in the problem
3. Recognise that collaboration is possible even when differences exist
4. Recognise that all people have capacities and strengths
5. Maintain a focus on competency and cast a vision for excellence
6. Learn what the family needs and strives for
7. Always humbly engage others
8. Focus on creating small changes
9. Don't interpret actions; ask questions
10. Offer choices
11. Treat every engagement as an opportunity for growth
12. Treat the practice principles as aspirations, not assumptions. (2019 Elia International Limited)

Please use the link below to access further information:
https://cumberlandsafeguardingchildren.co.uk/signs-safety-cumberland

Signs of Well-being and Success

In Early Help, we use the Early Help Assessment to ensure that children, young people and their families get the right help, at the right time. Signs of Wellbeing and Success is in line with the Signs of Safety practice approach, and works within the same practice principles when assessing and planning with children and families.

An Early Help Assessment is a way of identifying how we can support children and their families to meet their needs. It is voluntary and needs consent from the parent or carer, or where appropriate the young person. The Early Help Assessment uses the same method of gathering and analysing information, providing clear goals with solutions to change.

Within Signs of Safety and Signs of Wellbeing and Success, we adopt a Think Family approach, as we know that a child's needs must be understood holistically. Therefore, we work not only with the child, but also with the wider family and network.

More information and guidance can be found on the CSCP Website:
https://cumberlandsafeguardingchildren.co.uk

Designated Safeguarding Lead

Every organisation has a Designated Safeguarding Officer/Lead or Safeguarding Team. They are responsible for taking the lead for safeguarding worries within their organisation. The Designated Safeguarding Lead should be the first point of contact for all staff who need advice and guidance around safeguarding worries. This includes supporting staff and colleagues within their organisation in decision making and information sharing around worries for a child's welfare and safety. Conversations with the Designated Safeguarding Lead should be used to gain advice, reflect on concerns and determine the next steps at all levels of supporting children.

Information Sharing

Effective sharing of information between practitioners, local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision to keep children safe. Child's Safeguarding Practice Reviews have highlighted that missed opportunities to record, understand the significance of, and share information in a timely manner, can have severe consequences for the safety and welfare of children and young people. Sharing information enables practitioners and agencies to identify and provide appropriate services that safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 states that practitioners should be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children, whether this is when problems are first emerging, or where a child is already known to Local Authority Children's Social Care (e.g. they are being supported as a Child in Need or have a Child Protection Plan). Practitioners should be alert to sharing important information about any adults with whom that child has contact with, which may impact the child's safety or welfare.

Each agency has an individual responsibility to record all conversations in relation to their involvement in the lives of children and young people, whatever the outcome, recordings need to be appropriate and in accordance with each agency's procedures, in order to show that conversations took place and what was agreed. Recording needs to be clear, concise, explain the evidence, explain the analysis, and record the decisions, the people responsible for actions and the timescales. The Signs of Safety mapping tool provides a useful framework to do this: **https://cumberlandsafeguardingchildren.co.uk/signs-safety-cumberland**

The seven golden rules of information sharing can be found here:
https://assets.publishing. service.gov.uk/media/623c57d28fa8f540eea34c27/Information_sharing_advice_ practitioners_safeguarding_services.pdf

Consent

When considering sharing information or referring a child, young person and their family/carer, you need to consider the following:

- If you do not believe or have the evidence that the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, but it is a child or family that needs help and support, you must seek the consent of a parent, and child, if the child is over 13 years old and has capacity, to share their information with another service.
- If you believe that the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm then you should share the information, but you must inform both the parent and child, if the child is over 13 years old and has capacity, prior to sharing that information. You must tell them whom you are sharing information with and why.
- In rare circumstances, whereby the informing of parent/child before information sharing is believed to increase or pose a risk of significant harm to the child or jeopardise a potential police criminal enquiry, the information sharing should be made without informing the parent/child.
- Parental refusal to provide consent to share information or to undertake an assessment, can be indicative of increasing risk to the child/ren. The impact for the child should be considered and advice should be sought from Designated Safeguarding Leads or line managers to aid reflection in these situations.

Do not delay disclosing information to obtain consent if that might put children or young people at risk of significant harm.

In Cumberland, a referral to the Children Advice and Support Service (CCASS) from a practitioner working with a family in any capacity, unless in exceptional circumstances, will not be treated as anonymous, so the parent will, ultimately, become aware of the identity of the referrer and agency. This reflects everyone's responsibility to safeguard children. Where the parent refuses to give permission for the referral to Children's Social Care, unless it causes undue delay for the child, further advice should be sought from your Designated Safeguarding Lead or line manager and the outcome recorded.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 provides additional guidance about information sharing, along with some common myths that hinder effective information sharing, which can be found on Pages 21-22: **Working together to safeguard children 2026**

Further information about Information Sharing can be found in the DfE's Information Sharing Guidance: **DfE non statutory information sharing advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services for children, young people,parents and carers**

Resolving Disagreements and Escalation

National and local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, formerly known as Serious Case Reviews, have highlighted the importance of professionals challenging decisions to ensure the best outcomes for children, young people and their families. Local Reviews have found that concerns about decisions are often not challenged professionally.

The CSCP has an 'Escalation Policy' in place to support you if you disagree with a decision made relating to a child. The policy outlines the process when any professional has a concern or disagreement with an agency decision or action related to a child. Its aim is to ensure that the focus is kept on the child's safety and well-being through promoting a culture of professional challenge and providing framework for timely and effective resolutions. At no time must professional disagreement detract from ensuring that the child is safeguarded. The child's welfare and safety must remain paramount throughout.

The Escalation Policy can be found here:
https://cumbriascp.trixonline.co.uk/chapter/escalation-policy

For a step by step guide of how to use the Escalation Policy, the CSCP have created Stages of Escalation Procedure, which can be found here: **CSCP Stages of Escalation Procedure.pdf**

Role of the LADO

Allegations are sometimes made against practitioners or others working with children and young people. It is a legal requirement that any agency must inform the Local Authority Designated Officer (known as LADO), within one working day, when an allegation is made against any member of staff or volunteer and prior to any further investigation taking place.

Further details on this process can be found on the CSCP website:
https://cumberlandsafeguardingchildren.co.uk/guidance-and-resources/allegations-against-staff-lado

Glossary

Term	Definition
Abuse	A form of harm to a child, including physical, emotional or sexual harm, or neglect, that may require safeguarding or statutory intervention.
Assessment	A structured process of gathering and analysing information about a child and family to understand needs, strengths and risks.
CCASS	Cumberland Children's Advice and Support Service – the central point for advice, consultation and referrals.
Child in Need (CiN)	A child who requires services to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development (Section 17 of the Children Act 1989).
Child Protection (CP)	A multi-agency response where a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm (Section 47 of the Children Act 1989).
Community Based (Partner Led Early Help) Support	Level 2 support for emerging needs that cannot be met through universal services alone.
Consent	Agreement from a parent, carer or young person to share information or complete an assessment.
Continuum of Need	Framework describing levels of need from universal support to statutory services.
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	The person responsible for safeguarding within an organisation, school or setting.
Early Help	Support provided as soon as needs emerge to prevent escalation.
Early Help Assessment (EHA)	A voluntary assessment used to identify strengths, needs and required support.
Family Help	Level 3 support for complex or multiple unmet needs requiring multi-agency intervention.
Harm	Anything that has a negative effect on a child's health, development, or wellbeing. This could be physical, emotional, or due to neglect. Harm does not always mean a child is in immediate danger, but it does mean they may need help or support to stop things from getting worse.
Significant Harm	When the impact on a child is serious enough that they are at risk of real and lasting impairment. This could be because of the severity of what is happening, how often it happens, or how it is affecting the child over time. At this point, services must take action to protect the child, not just offer support.

Term	Definition
Neglect	Persistent failure to meet a child's physical, emotional or developmental needs.
Referral	The process of contacting a service such as CCASS for support or safeguarding.
Signs of Safety	A strengths-based approach focusing on safety, strengths and next steps.
TAF (Team Around the Family)	A multi-agency group working together with the family to plan and review support.
Universal Services	Services available to all children, young people and families, such as health and education.