



Staying Safe:

A consultation document

Summary



Foreword



Keeping children and young people safe is a top priority. It is the responsibility of us all. That is why this consultation document seeks to promote discussion about how we could all do that better. Its purpose is to set out how we can work together to help children and young people stay safe, and make the most of their talents and new opportunities to fulfil their potential. I want to encourage the widest possible range of responses.

Childhood has changed. Children's lives today are different from those of the previous generation, just as our childhood was different from that of our parents. Some of those changes are for the better, bringing new opportunities and experiences. Others present challenges and sometimes bring risks. But all children and young people everywhere, whatever their background or circumstances, need a childhood that they can enjoy and which allows them to thrive and develop their full potential.

Commitment to improving children's safety is shared right across Government. In *Every Child Matters*, we set out our aim to help all children and young people achieve five outcomes – ones that children themselves had told us are the most important to them: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being. Staying safe is vital for children and young people's happiness and well-being. Unless they are safe, children will not be able to achieve in other areas of their lives.

Children and young people today are, in many ways, safer than in previous generations and have opportunities that their parents and grandparents would not have dreamed of. Rates of accidents are down, including on the roads. Many childhood diseases can now be prevented or cured.

But society today is more complex than in previous generations, and this can bring new risks for children and young people's safety. Family structures are changing, communities are more diverse, and some of the traditional support networks, particularly for parents, are not available to many families. Growth in new technologies has brought wonderful new opportunities for education, information, communication and leisure but it also brings new opportunities for people who wish to harm children – for example through online grooming, sharing abusive images or as a means to bully other children and young people.

We rightly have high expectations for our children today. We want them to be protected from any sort of harm and abuse. But this does not mean that we should wrap children and young people up in cotton wool. Childhood is a time for learning and exploring. Through playing and doing positive activities, children and young people can learn to understand better the opportunities and challenges in the world around them, and how to stay safe. We want everyone in society to take responsibility for helping children and young people to stay safe. This does not mean interfering in other people's lives, but does mean accepting a collective responsibility for children's safety and welfare. It is important that we all recognise that children and young people are individuals, just as much members of society as any adult, and they deserve to be valued, respected and listened to.

Government has a role to play in supporting parents to strike the right balance between protecting their children whilst allowing them to learn

and explore new situations safely. We are introducing the toughest vetting and barring scheme ever for people working with children. And at a local level, we have put co-operation on children's safety on a statutory footing, with Local Safeguarding Children Boards in every local authority area. Improving children's life chances – and their chance of having a safe and happy childhood – will be one of the themes of our nationwide consultation over the summer to develop a Children's Plan for our country.

But bringing up children is the responsibility of parents not Government, and children and young people know that their family and friends can do most to keep them safe.

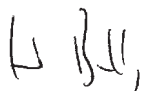
Parents – fathers and mothers – worry about their children's safety, including keeping children safe on the roads and protecting them from strangers. Parents we have talked to tend to worry most about risks they had encountered in their own childhood, but there are new threats in today's society. Parents generally feel a responsibility for other people's children as well, but are sometimes worried about the consequences of intervening if they have concerns about another child's safety.

By publishing *Staying Safe* for consultation*, we want to raise awareness of how we can all help children and young people to stay safe. We set out what is happening nationally and locally to keep children safe, and highlight examples of good practice which we hope can help to share ideas and spread innovation. We also look at areas where we think we could be doing more to improve children's safety, as well as how we can make action already underway or planned more coherent and more effective.

* The full *Staying Safe* consultation document is available at www.ecm.gov.uk/stayingsafe

We want to hear your views and start a debate about children's safety. How safe do you think children are? If you are a parent, what concerns do you have about your children's safety, and how do you address these? If you are a child or young person yourself, are the views of children and young people included here the same as yours and those of your friends? And as a member of the public, do you feel a sense of responsibility for protecting children? If you work with children and young people, or employ people who do, do you know what your role is in keeping children safe?

I am particularly pleased and proud to launch this consultation on behalf of my colleagues across Government. We hope that by talking about these issues, and by proposing new work in some areas, we can do even more to improve the safety of children and young people.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Balls'.

**Rt Hon Ed Balls MP,
Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families**

Introduction

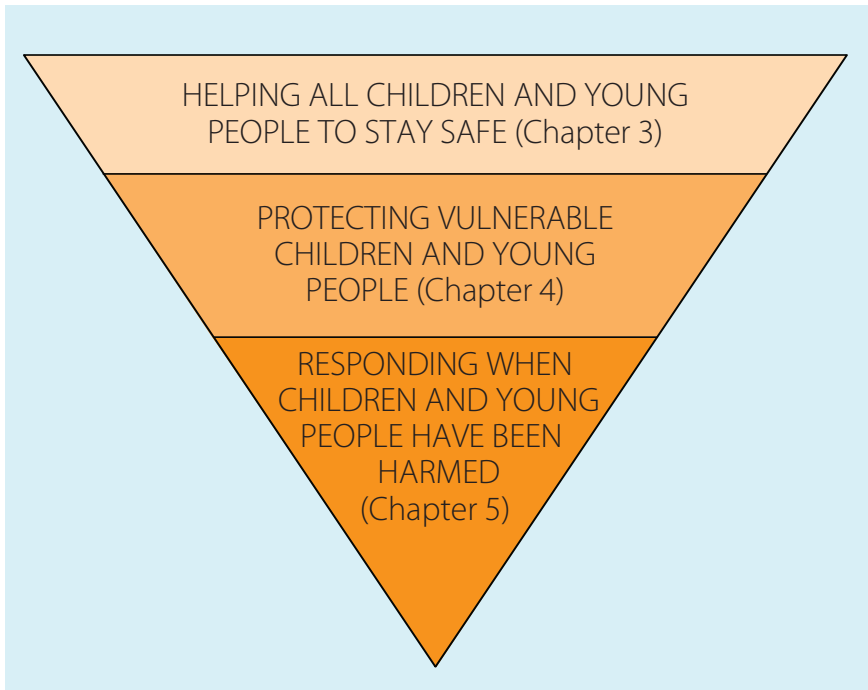
1. Children and young people today enjoy a variety of activities and opportunities that would have seemed unimaginable to their parents and grandparents. The internet and other new technologies have opened up a world of information, education, communication and entertainment. Travel has become more accessible and easier. Improvements in educational standards mean that more children and young people have the opportunity for further studying and better job prospects.
2. Children and young people have more choice, but also face new challenges. Children grow up in many different family and community structures, and sometimes in countries different from where they or their parents were born. And while standards and opportunities have improved overall, some children are still left behind, particularly in some groups in society.
3. Over the past decade, significant progress has been made in services offered to children and families. A new legal framework has been put in place, laying the foundations for the *Every Child Matters* reforms aimed at achieving the five outcomes children and young people told us they most value:
 - being healthy;
 - staying safe;
 - enjoying and achieving;

- making a positive contribution; and
 - achieving economic well-being.
4. Of all the five outcomes, young children see safety as the most important. Staying safe is about more than just preventing accidents. It is also about helping to keep children safe from bullies, crime and anti-social behaviour, and protecting children who are at risk of abuse and neglect. To stay safe, children and young people also need to have security, stability and be cared for by parents, carers and families.
 5. Children's safety has improved in many areas. The overall number of accidental injuries to children has been declining steadily. There has been a 52% reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents since the mid-1990s.
 6. But there are still challenges:
 - abuse and neglect remains a serious issue, and the vast majority of abusers are people the child knows;
 - children from deprived backgrounds are at a much higher risk of accidents than those from better off households – 13 times more likely to die from accidental injuries and 37 times more likely to die because of smoke, fire or flames;
 - bullying is consistently reported by children and young people as their top safety concern;
 - new technologies, such as the internet, offer tremendous opportunities, but also present new threats including online grooming and sharing of abusive images; and
 - children and young people fear for their safety on the streets.

'Every full double-decker school bus at the end of the day is likely to be taking home around 7 seriously unhappy children. Most of the lower deck would at some time during their childhood have been going home to serious worries. Approximately 10 children may be going home to a 'double-shift' of cleaning, laundry, shopping and preparing meals, and 2 or 3 will be in fear of violence between their parents while they were out, or of what might happen that evening.'

NSPCC study, 2000

7. The Government is launching this consultation to raise awareness of issues around children's safety, including how to strike a balance between keeping children safe and allowing them to grow, explore and enjoy their childhoods. This document:
 - summarises what is already being done nationally and locally to keep children and young people safe;
 - proposes some new actions to reinforce and complement what is already in place; and
 - invites views on the issues and our proposals.
8. We want to hear your views and suggestions. After the consultation, which will finish at the end of October, we will consider responses and decide which actions to take forward.
9. When thinking about what happens nationally and locally to help children and young people stay safe, we look at three different levels of activity, as set out in the following picture.



10. We use this framework to describe current work and make proposals for new action:
- all children and young people need safe environments in which to grow and thrive;
 - some children and young people, including disabled children and children in care, are particularly vulnerable and we need targeted measures to help to keep them as safe as possible;
 - and sadly, some children will suffer, or have already suffered from harm, and for these children we need to respond effectively to minimise the short and long-term effects on them.

Helping all children and young people to stay safe

12. Safety is important for all children and young people – being safe at home, at school or college, on the roads, at play or leisure – and it is everyone’s responsibility to create these safe environments so that children and young people can enjoy and achieve. Children and young people rate staying safe as one of the most important things to help them enjoy their childhoods, but also want the freedom to enjoy their spare time and be with their friends.
13. Work already underway to improve safety for all children and young people includes:
 - preventing accidents in the home – including support from midwives and health visitors, work to improve standards of housing and fire service support to fit smoke alarms;
 - improving protection for children and young people on the internet – including work of organisations such as the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) and the Internet Watch Foundation;
 - continuing to make schools, colleges and early years settings safer for children and young people – including creating a safe physical environment, tackling bullying, checking the

background of those working with children and improving safety outside the classroom;

- preventing of injuries to children caused by road accidents – with a new Government plan of action launched earlier this year to continue existing improvements, focusing on reducing casualties among older children and child pedestrians, and improving the behaviour of car drivers and other road users; and
- protecting children and young people from risks of abuse or neglect – including a strong legal framework, a new and thorough system for vetting those hoping to work with children and improved joint working between local agencies.

14. We have identified five areas where we think more could be done to help all children and young people to stay safe:

- play and taking part in positive activities – to help children and young people learn about taking risks in a safe environment;
- understanding and managing risk – to help both parents and children and young people themselves understand how to keep children safe, including how the curriculum in schools can promote this;
- a safe workforce – making further improvements to systems so that employers, including parents, can make sure people who apply to work with children are safe to do so;
- addressing new threats to children’s safety – particularly helping parents to understand how they can keep their children safe online or when using mobile phones; and

- helping Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) to make a difference. These are new statutory boards in each local authority area which co-ordinate work carried out by different local agencies – including police, health, social care and education – to keep children safe.

15. Our proposals for new action in these five areas include:

- launching a communications campaign to encourage parents to let their children play outside in safe environments and take part in positive activities safely;
- promoting safer recruitment practices in all sectors where work with children and young people is involved, extending guidance recently issued for schools and colleges to other settings;
- implementing the new vetting and barring scheme, including the new Independent Safeguarding Authority, to help ensure unsuitable people can not work with children;
- communicating to parents about how to keep their children safe in sporting activities and about risks their children face online; and
- publishing a best practice guide for LCSBs, to highlight examples of good local practice.

Protecting vulnerable children and young people

16. Some groups of children and young people are more vulnerable to harm than others. Children from deprived backgrounds are at greater risk from accidents. Children who do not live at home for one reason or another may be at higher risk of harm. There are also overlaps between the types of harm a child might face, for example children and young people who have been abused are more likely to be bullied at school.
17. We have already taken clear steps to reduce risks for some vulnerable groups:
 - joined-up working at local level to target children in need – including better training and IT systems to improve assessments of need and sharing of information between professionals;
 - better support for children in care – including new measures outlined in *Care Matters: Time for Change*, published in June 2007;
 - provision of short breaks for disabled children and their parents – £280 million will be spent between 2008 and 2011;

- improved support for young people at risk – including helping local agencies work together to help young people access extra support;
- procedures for protecting 16 and 17 year olds in the armed forces – including checking the background of service personnel working with young people;
- better protection for children and young people involved with courts – whether they are the subject of a case, a witness or if their parents are separating; and
- measures to improve safety of young people in custody, co-ordinated by the Youth Justice Board.

18. We have identified four areas where we think more could be done to protect vulnerable groups of children and young people:

- improving practice in children’s social care – to help protect the most vulnerable children and ensure good practice by social workers is recognised;
- reducing numbers of accidents – especially for vulnerable and low-income families who are at greater risk;
- addressing parental problems which impact on children and young people’s welfare – including parents who have violent relationships or are substance abusers; and
- improving safety on the streets – including tackling bullying outside school, and addressing problems caused by guns, knives and gang crime.

19. Our proposals for new action include:
- launching a new national safeguarding children awards scheme to celebrate and highlight individual contributions to improving children and young people's safety;
 - giving help to vulnerable and low-income families to help make their homes safer and reduce accidents;
 - proposing a new theme for the local authority beacon awards scheme to showcase good practice in reaching families whose children may be at risk of harm;
 - extending bullying policies used in schools to other settings, including children's homes, extended schools services, Further Education colleges and youth groups; and
 - identifying good local and international practice in addressing the risks of harm to children and young people involved in gangs.

Responding when children and young people have been harmed

20. Some children and young people are harmed and it may be that this will not have a long-lasting effect. But where a child or young person has been harmed, action must be taken to respond to this as quickly and effectively as possible.
21. We have made several improvements in this area in recent years, including:
 - learning lessons where things go wrong – including Serious Case Reviews where a serious injury or death to a child involves abuse or neglect, and new Child Death Overview Panels, which will be set up in each local area from April 2008;
 - improving support for victims of abuse – including guidelines for services to help improve outcomes for those who have suffered abuse;
 - tackling exploitation of children – including children who are trafficked or who are involved in prostitution;
 - supporting victims of forced marriage – through the Government's Forced Marriage Unit, which handles between

250 and 300 cases of forced marriage a year, one third of which involve minors, some as young as eight years old; and

- improving the way that offenders are managed – with a recent review by the Home Office enhancing protection for children from sex offenders.
22. We have identified two areas where we think more could be done to respond when children and young people have been harmed:
- highlighting the role of the public in children and young people’s safety – including making sure children who are harmed have somewhere to turn, and looking at how members of the public can be encouraged to see all children’s safety as their responsibility; and
 - better safeguards for children coming in to and going out of this country – including a new framework for the Border and Immigration Agency signalling how it will help to keep children safe from harm.
23. Our proposals for new action include:
- providing additional support for listening services via ChildLine;
 - launching a public education campaign to improve the public’s ability to identify and report concerns about children’s safety; and
 - ensuring immigration staff dealing with children are alert to child safety issues and know how to refer on serious concerns.

How to get involved

24. This is an open consultation and we want to hear your views. Here are some questions to prompt your thinking:

How safe do you think children and young people are? How good are we at giving children and young people the opportunity to explore, understand risks for themselves, and to learn the skills vital for their development?

If you are a parent, what concerns do you have about your children's safety, and how do you address these?

If you are a child or young person, what concerns do you and your friends have about your safety?

As a member of the public, do you feel a sense of responsibility for protecting children and young people? How can we build this sense of responsibility in local communities?

If you work with children and young people, do you know what your role is in keeping them safe?

Have you seen or heard of any good examples of work to keep children and young people safe?

Have we got the right balance between keeping children and young people safe and also allowing them the freedom to develop?

Are the areas we have identified for new action right? What other areas could be considered and what more could we do?

How can local and central government do more to protect all children by reaching out to minority communities and the most vulnerable families?

25. If you would like to read the full version of *Staying Safe*, it is available at www.ecm.gov.uk/stayingsafe
26. To respond to the consultation and find out about other ways to get involved, visit www.ecm.gov.uk/stayingsafe or email staying.safe@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk

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