



Gateway to Safeguarding: Additional Information for those Safeguarding Children and Young People in Northern Ireland

The information below is to support those whose organisations work with the following groups in Northern Ireland: Children and young people; parents and carers; and those who may pose risk to children. Reading this alongside your Gateway eLearning Course will enable you to meet the Level 1 requirements of the SBNI Learning and Development Framework.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international agreement that sets out the basic rights every child and young person under 18 should have, wherever they live and whatever their background.

At its core, the UNCRC says that every child has the right to:

- **Be safe** – protected from harm, abuse, violence, and exploitation.
- **Be heard** – have their views listened to and taken seriously in decisions that affect them.
- **Be treated fairly** – enjoy equality, non-discrimination, and access to justice.
- **Be healthy** – access healthcare, nutritious food, clean water, and a safe environment.
- **Learn and develop** – receive education, play, rest, and support to reach their potential.
- **Practice their beliefs** – freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, while also being protected from pressure or harm in relation to those beliefs.
- **Be part of family and community life** – grow up in a loving, supportive environment that respects their identity, culture, and background.

The UNCRC places responsibility on adults—parents, carers, professionals, and wider society—to act in the best interests of the child, ensure their dignity is respected, and create environments where they can flourish physically, emotionally, spiritually, and socially.

Children’s rights are central to safeguarding law and guidance in Northern Ireland and the UNCRC underpins much of what your organisation is required to do to safeguard children and young people.

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 is the main law for safeguarding children and young people in Northern Ireland. It promotes children’s safety and wellbeing, ensuring that their best interests are at the centre of all decisions affecting them.

There are 5 key principles:

- **Welfare is paramount** – a child’s best interests must always come first.
- **Parental responsibility** – parents have the primary role in caring for their children.
- **Partnership with families** – services work *with* families, not instead of them.
- **Prevention** – early support should be offered to stop problems escalating.
- **Protection** – the state must act when a child is at risk of significant harm.

Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People (2024)

Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland (2024) is the main national policy for safeguarding children and young people in Northern Ireland. It provides a framework for all organisations – including charities, faith and community groups – to work together to protect children and young people.

Its core principles are:

Child-centred: That children’s safety, welfare, and voice come first in safeguarding.

Partnership: Agencies, families, charity, faith and community groups collaborate to safeguard effectively.

Clear Roles: Everyone understands their safeguarding responsibilities.

Consistency and Accountability: Shared standards, reporting routes, and expectations.

Prevention and Early Intervention: Act early to reduce risks of harm.

This policy is where you can find useful safeguarding information such as - definitions of 'harm', 'significant harm', 'child in need', and 'child in need of protection'. Categories of abuse and exploitation. Roles of key safeguarding bodies: SBNI (Safeguarding Board of Northern Ireland), HSCs (Health and Social Care Trusts), PSNI (Police Service Northern Ireland), health professionals, social workers, independent guardians. Expectations and routes for reporting, information-sharing, working with other agencies.