



Liverpool Safeguarding Children Partnership

Working together to promote children's
welfare and provide family help

Responding to Need Guidance and Levels of Need Framework

April 2026

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Introduction

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 provides the regulatory framework for children safeguarding partners to publish a threshold document. This Liverpool Safeguarding Children Partnership Level of Need documents is to support multi-agency partners working with children, young people and families understand our levels of need.

The document provides a clear and common framework for all agencies to identify, assess and respond to need, reinforcing the collective responsibility to deliver timely coordinated early Family help and intervention. Providing support before problems escalate helps reduce risk and enables children to thrive within their families.

Consent

Whenever multi-agency practitioners and managers are using this Level of Need document it should be considered against other factors including repeat referrals, a lack of change or parental disengagement. Whilst it is important to seek parental consent to make a referral for an assessment and support, practitioners and managers should also be mindful if parental consent is not given how this may impact or harm a child or young person if such assessments or services are not provided against identified needs. It is not necessary to seek consent to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of a child or young person, provided there is another lawful basis for sharing.



Glossary of Terms

CASS

Children's Advice and Support Service: The front door for safeguarding referrals in Liverpool.

FHAT

Family Help Assessment Tool: A tool used to assess the needs of children and families and coordinate Family Help support.

TAF

Team Around the Family: A multi-agency group that works together to support a family through a FHA plan.

MARF

Multi-Agency Referral Form: A form used to refer safeguarding concerns to CASS.

PP

Perplexing Presentation or Induced Illness: A form of abuse where a parent or carer exaggerates or causes illness in a child.

CP

Child Protection: A statutory process to protect children at risk of significant harm.

CIN

Child in Need: A statutory threshold under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 for children who require additional support.

Universal Plus

A term used to describe children with emerging needs that require additional support beyond universal services.

Statutory Intervention

Involvement from statutory services such as Children's Social Care.

Emotional Warmth

The consistent provision of affection, praise, and encouragement by caregivers.

Stimulation

Opportunities for play, learning, and development provided by caregivers.

Guidance and Boundaries

The setting of clear and consistent expectations and rules by caregivers.

Stability

The consistency and predictability of a child's home and caregiving environment.



Level 1 – Universal Needs Indicators

These are indicators where children and families are thriving and their needs are met through universal services. There are no significant concerns, and support is accessed as needed.

A. Child Development Needs

Health

- Physically healthy and meeting developmental milestones
- Adequate diet, hygiene, and clothing
- Immunisations and developmental checks are up to date
- Regular attendance at dental and optical appointments
- Health appointments are kept
- Speech, language, and communication development is age-appropriate

Education and Learning

- Attending school or early years setting regularly and on time
- Engaged in learning and achieving expected educational milestones
- Access to books, toys, and stimulating play opportunities
- Demonstrates curiosity and interest in learning
- Supported to make choices and celebrate achievements

Emotional and Behavioural Development

- Demonstrates appropriate emotional responses and behaviours
- Able to adapt to change and manage frustration
- Shows empathy and understanding of others
- Has secure early attachments and positive relationships
- Displays confidence and a positive sense of self

Identity

- Has a clear sense of self and belonging
- Feels accepted and valued by peers and adults
- Able to express needs and preferences
- Positive self-esteem and confidence in learning and social settings

Family and Social Relationships

- Secure, affectionate relationships with caregivers
- Positive relationships with siblings and peers
- Supported by family and friends
- Able to form and sustain age-appropriate friendships

Social Presentation

- Dresses appropriately for different settings
- Maintains good personal hygiene
- Presents in a way that is appropriate for their age and context

Self-Care Skills

- Developing age-appropriate independence in daily routines (e.g. dressing, feeding)
- Demonstrates growing emotional and practical skills
- Uses technology safely and appropriately



B. Parenting Capacity

Basic Care

- Parents/carers provide for the child's physical needs (e.g. food, clothing, medical care)
- Home environment is clean, safe, and nurturing

Ensuring Safety

- Parents/carers protect the child from harm and danger
- Internet access is monitored appropriately
- Children are supervised in line with their age and needs

Emotional Warmth

- Parents/carers show consistent warmth, praise, and encouragement
- Child feels loved, valued, and emotionally secure

Stimulation

- Parents/carers engage in play, learning, and communication with the child
- Child is supported to explore, learn, and succeed

Guidance and Boundaries

- Parents/carers set clear, age-appropriate boundaries
- Positive role modelling and consistent expectations

Stability

- Family routines are predictable and supportive
- Attachments are secure and not disrupted unnecessarily

C. Family and Environmental Factors

Family History or Functioning

- Family relationships are positive, even if parents are separated
- No significant changes in family composition
- Parents manage conflict appropriately and do not involve children

Wider Family

- Supportive extended family network
- Child has access to positive adult role models

Housing

- Safe, stable, and suitable accommodation
- Basic amenities are available and well maintained

Employment

- Parents/carers are in employment or actively seeking work
- Employment is not causing undue stress or instability

Income

- Family income is stable and sufficient to meet basic needs
- Resources are used appropriately to support the child

Family Social Integration

- Family is integrated into the local community
- Positive peer and community relationships

Community Resources

- Access to good quality universal services (e.g. schools, health, leisure)
- No barriers to accessing support or activities



Level 2 – Emerging Needs (Universal Plus)

Children and families at this level have additional or emerging needs that are beginning to impact their wellbeing or development. These needs cannot be fully met by universal services alone and may require targeted support from one or more agencies.

A. Child Development Needs

Health

- Minor concerns about diet, hygiene, or sleep routines
- Concerns about developmental progress: e.g. overweight/underweight, bedwetting/soiling
- Occasional missed health or dental appointments
- Early signs of developmental delay
- Susceptibility to minor health issues
- Beginning to experiment with smoking or alcohol (age/context considered)
- Emerging concerns around sexual health or behaviour (age/context considered)

Education and Learning

- Inconsistent school attendance or punctuality
- Has some identified additional learning needs
- Language and communication difficulties
- Reduced engagement in learning or low motivation
- Not achieving expected educational progress
- Limited access to learning resources at home
- Some difficulties with peer or adult relationships in school
- High mobility between schools impacting learning

Emotional and Behavioural Development

- Low self-esteem or confidence in some settings
- Difficulty managing change or transitions
- Occasional emotional outbursts or inappropriate responses
- Early signs of anxiety, withdrawal, or frustration
- Some concerns about risk-taking behaviour (e.g. early substance use, self-harm ideation)

Identity

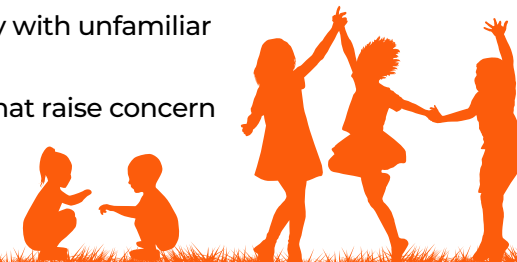
- Expressing confusion or insecurity about identity or belonging
- May be experiencing low confidence linked to cultural, social, or personal factors
- Early signs of being affected by peer pressure or bullying
- Uncertainty or discomfort in expressing aspects of identity (e.g. gender, sexuality)

Family and Social Relationships

- Some difficulties forming or maintaining friendships
- Signs of social isolation or withdrawal
- Peer group may be influencing negative behaviour
- Some conflict within sibling or peer relationships
- May be providing informal care for a family member

Social Presentation

- Occasionally presents with poor hygiene or unwashed clothing
- May appear withdrawn or overly friendly with unfamiliar adults
- Changes in appearance or peer group that raise concern



Self-Care Skills

- Developing independence but may need support with routines
- Slow to develop age-appropriate self-care skills
- Early signs of inappropriate or excessive use of technology

Basic Care

- Parents/carers may need support to consistently meet the child's physical needs
- Some concerns about home cleanliness, nutrition, or clothing

B. Parenting Capacity

Ensuring Safety

- Parents may struggle to consistently supervise or protect the child
- Some exposure to unsafe environments (e.g. online harm, community safety)

Emotional Warmth

- Inconsistent emotional responses from parents/carers
- Child may not always feel emotionally secure or valued

Stimulation

- Limited opportunities for play, learning, or new experiences
- Parents may need support to engage in stimulating activities with the child

Guidance and Boundaries

- Boundaries may be unclear or inconsistently applied
- Parents may need support in managing behaviour or setting expectations

Stability

- Some disruption to routines or attachments
- Family may be experiencing stress or instability that affects parenting

Family History or Functioning

- Some conflict or communication difficulties within the family
- Recent bereavement, separation, or other significant change
- Parents may have low-level mental or physical health needs

C. Family and Environmental Factors

Wider Family

- Limited support from extended family
- Some tension or lack of communication with wider family network

Housing

- Housing is safe but may be overcrowded or in poor condition
- Family may be at risk of homelessness or frequent moves

Employment

- Parents may be unemployed or in insecure work
- Financial stress may be affecting family wellbeing

Income

- Low income may limit access to resources or opportunities
- Family may be experiencing debt or financial hardship

Family Social Integration

- Family may feel isolated or excluded from the community
- Limited access to positive peer and community networks

Community Resources

- Some barriers to accessing local services or activities
- Services may not be culturally appropriate or accessible



Level 3 – Targeted Needs Indicators

Children and families at this level have multiple and more complex needs that are not met or are only partially met. These needs require a coordinated multi-agency response to prevent escalation and promote positive outcomes.

A. Child Development Needs

Health

- Ongoing concerns about diet, hygiene, or sleep routines
- Chronic/recurring health difficulties are not treated or are poorly managed
- Recurring health issues or chronic conditions requiring regular monitoring
- Missed essential health appointments
- Substance misuse impacting health or development
- Developmental milestones unlikely to be met without targeted support
- Emerging or diagnosed mental health concerns
- Teenage pregnancy requiring multi-agency support

Education and Learning

- Escalating school attendance or punctuality issues
- Fixed-term exclusions or risk of permanent exclusion
- Not engaged in education or significantly below expected attainment
- Fear or anxiety related to school attendance
- Limited access to educational resources or support at home

Emotional and Behavioural Development

- Persistent low self-esteem or emotional distress
- Age inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- Difficulty managing emotions, anger, or frustration
- Disruptive or challenging behaviour at school or in the community
- Risk-taking behaviours (e.g. self-harm, substance misuse)
- Difficulty forming or maintaining relationships
- Limited ability to demonstrate empathy or understand consequences

Identity

- Experiences of discrimination or exclusion (e.g. related to race, disability, gender, or sexuality)
- Strong influence from peer groups or ideologies that promote harmful beliefs
- Low self-worth or internalised negative identity
- Over-identification with a group or ideology that isolates the child

Family and Social Relationships

- Conflict or breakdown in peer or sibling relationships
- Exposed to domestic abuse or chronic parental conflict within the household or family
- Involvement in or exposure to anti-social behaviour or criminal activity



- Caring responsibilities impacting the child's wellbeing or development
- Limited or negative peer influences
- Social isolation or lack of trusted adults outside the home

Social Presentation

- Child/young person requires ongoing support with personal care routines
- Provocative or concerning behaviour or dress (Sudden changes in appearance, new clothes, sudden weight loss, or use of make-up or dressing inappropriately for their age).
- Sudden changes in peer group or unexplained possessions

Self-Care Skills

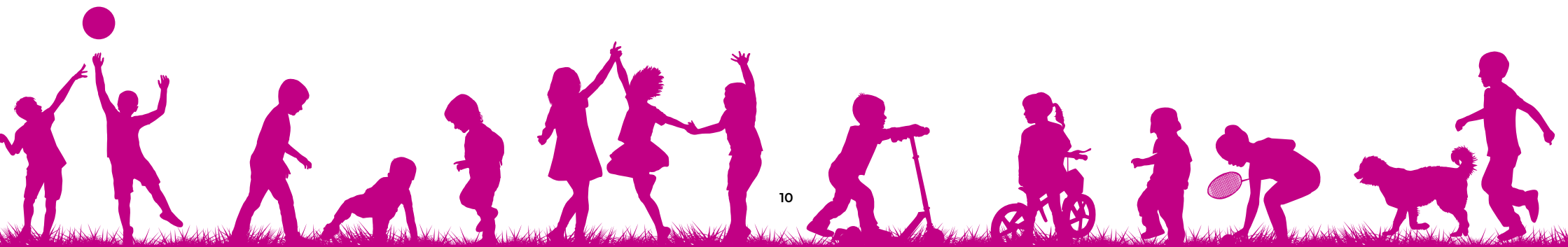
- Poor self-care for age, including hygiene and routines
- Inappropriate independence or adult-like responsibilities
- Unsafe or excessive use of technology or online platforms

Expectant Parents

- Parents are not fully engaging with key professionals for their unborn baby and are not fully accepting guidance or advice
- Parents have made little preparation for the baby when born
- Parents have a history of mental health difficulties.
- Parents have vulnerabilities and have little or no support network
- Concerns regarding parent/carers bond and attachment to the unborn baby

Parental Capacity

- Indicators the parent or care giver ability to provide 'good enough' parenting to meet the child health, development and emotional needs



Level 4 – Safeguarding and Specialist Needs Indicators

Children and families at this level are experiencing significant harm or are at immediate risk of significant harm. These needs require statutory intervention and specialist services to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child.

A. Child Development Needs

Health

- Severe or chronic health problems
- Persistent substance misuse
- Developmental milestones are unlikely to be met
- Teenage pregnancy with acute level of need
- Serious mental health issues
- No engagement with health professionals

Education and Learning

- Non-attendance or chronic absence seriously impairing development
- Permanently excluded or no school place
- No access to leisure activities

Emotional and Behavioural Development

- Repeated episodes of self-harm and/or substance misuse
- Disruptive or challenging behaviour at school or in the community
- Risk-taking behaviours that place self or others in danger
- Involvement in criminal or exploitative activities

Identity

- Experiences persistent discrimination (e.g. racial, sexual orientation, disability)
- Involved with organised gangs or criminal activity
- Discriminating on grounds of gender, culture, or religious identity

Family and Social Relationships

- Little or no social relationships outside the home
- Family or friends involved in extremist or exploitative activity

- Periods of being accommodated by the Local Authority
- Subject to physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect

Social Presentation

- Poor and inappropriate self-presentation
- Missing (missing for lengthy periods, weekends or overnight from the family home.
- Unexplained amounts of money, mobile phones and drug

Self-Care Skills

- Poor self-care for age, including hygiene
- Inappropriate independence or adult-like responsibilities
- Unsafe or excessive use of technology or online platforms

Expectant Parents

- Parents have not accessed any anti natal care.
- The pregnancy has been concealed
- Parent with additional needs so requiring a high level of support.
- Mother has been using substances or excessive alcohol during pregnancy
- Mother shows no insight into the babies needs and there are concerns around the bond and attachment to the unborn child
- Unborn baby is at risk of harm from domestic abuse within the relationship of parent/carers

Parental Capacity

- Despite multi-agency engagement and support over a lengthy period the parents are not able to sustain 'good enough' parenting to meet the child's health, development and emotional needs.



Summary of Changes to Levels of Need Guidance

Sources Used

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)**
Statutory guidance for inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in England.
- Liverpool Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) Levels of Need Framework**
Including the original Levels of Need Indicators Tool and Levels of Need Overview.
- Professional best practice in safeguarding, family help, and inclusive communication (e.g. plain English, trauma-informed language).

Documents Created

- Level 1 – Universal Needs Indicators
- Level 2 – Emerging Needs Indicators
- Level 3 – Targeted Needs Indicators
- Level 4 – Safeguarding and Specialist Needs Indicators
- Revised Levels of Need Descriptions
- Glossary Terms

Thematic Changes

Theme	Description	Example (Before → After)
Inclusive Language	Removed stigmatising or judgmental terms; used respectful, people-first language.	“Teenage pregnancy (acute level of need)” → “Teenage pregnancy requiring multi-agency support”
Plain English	Replaced jargon or technical terms with accessible alternatives.	“Defaulting on immunisation checks” → “Occasional missed health or dental appointments”
Strengths-Based Approach	Focused on what’s going well and how to build on it, rather than deficits.	“Not always engaged in learning – poor concentration/low motivation” → “Reduced engagement in learning or low motivation”
Child-Centred and Family Help Focus	Emphasised early identification, lived experience, and coordinated support.	“Multi-agency response” → “Targeted support from one or more agencies to prevent escalation”
Clarity and Structure	Organised indicators by domain and level, using bullet points and headings.	Original table format → Structured by “Child Development”, “Parenting Capacity”, and “Family & Environmental Factors”

Updated Levels of Need Descriptions

Level 1 - Universal

Most children's needs are met through their family and universal services such as health, education, and community-based support. These children are making good progress in most areas of development and are thriving in safe, stable environments.

Support is provided through universal services. Families can access information and advice through services such as health visitors, schools, and the Family Information Service. Practitioners should remain alert to any emerging needs and be prepared to offer early help if concerns arise.

Level 2 - Emerging Needs / Universal Plus

Children and families have additional or emerging needs that are beginning to affect their wellbeing or development. These needs cannot be fully met by universal services alone and may require more targeted support.

A lead professional should be identified to coordinate support. A Family Help Assessment (FHA) may be initiated to understand the family's needs and develop a plan with the child and family. Support may come from one or more agencies working together to prevent escalation.

Level 3 - Targeted Needs

Children and families have multiple and more complex needs that are not being met, or are only partially met, and are experiencing significant stress. Without coordinated support, these needs are likely to escalate and may require statutory intervention.

Consent should be sought to refer the family to the Family Help Service. A multi-agency response is required, including a Team Around the Family (TAF) approach. Regular reviews and home visits may be necessary to monitor progress and adapt support.

Level 4 – Safeguarding and Specialist

Children are at risk of, or are experiencing, significant harm. Their needs are complex and cannot be met through family help. This includes situations where there is reasonable cause to suspect abuse, neglect, or exploitation, or where children are not being kept safe.

Immediate safeguarding action may be required. Practitioners must follow their agency's safeguarding procedures and contact CASS (Children's Advice and Support Service). A referral should be made using the Multi-Agency Referral Form (MARF). This level includes concerns such as Fabricated or Induced Illness (FII), which refers to situations where a parent or carer may exaggerate or cause illness in a child. These cases require specialist assessment and statutory intervention.