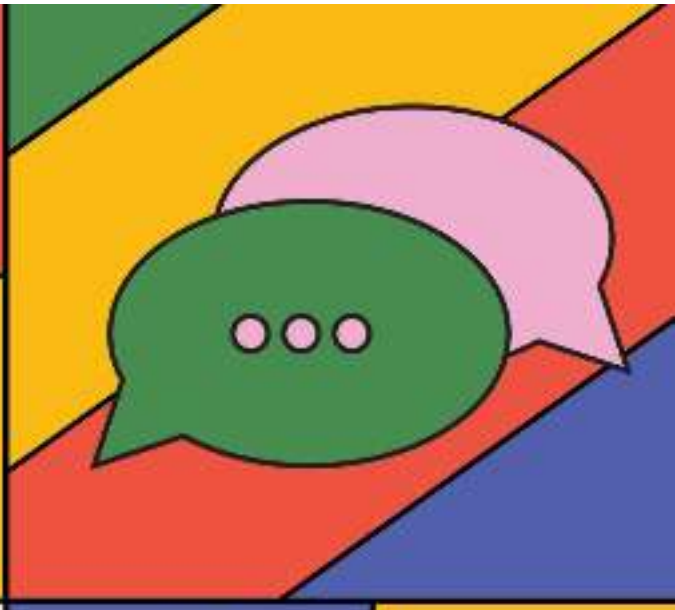
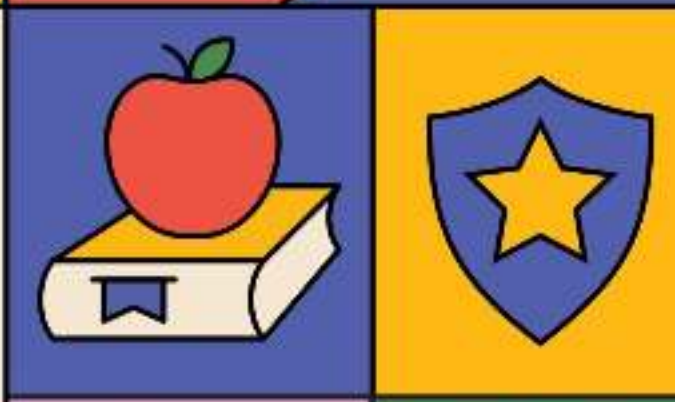


Working together to safeguard children

An illustrated guide to explain how different people and organisations work together to help, support and protect you.



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Introduction

No matter where you live, there will always be people you can reach out to for help. Examples of these people include teachers, social workers, police and health workers. Your parents and carers are also there to keep you safe, help you do the things you enjoy and help you do well at all the things you choose to do.

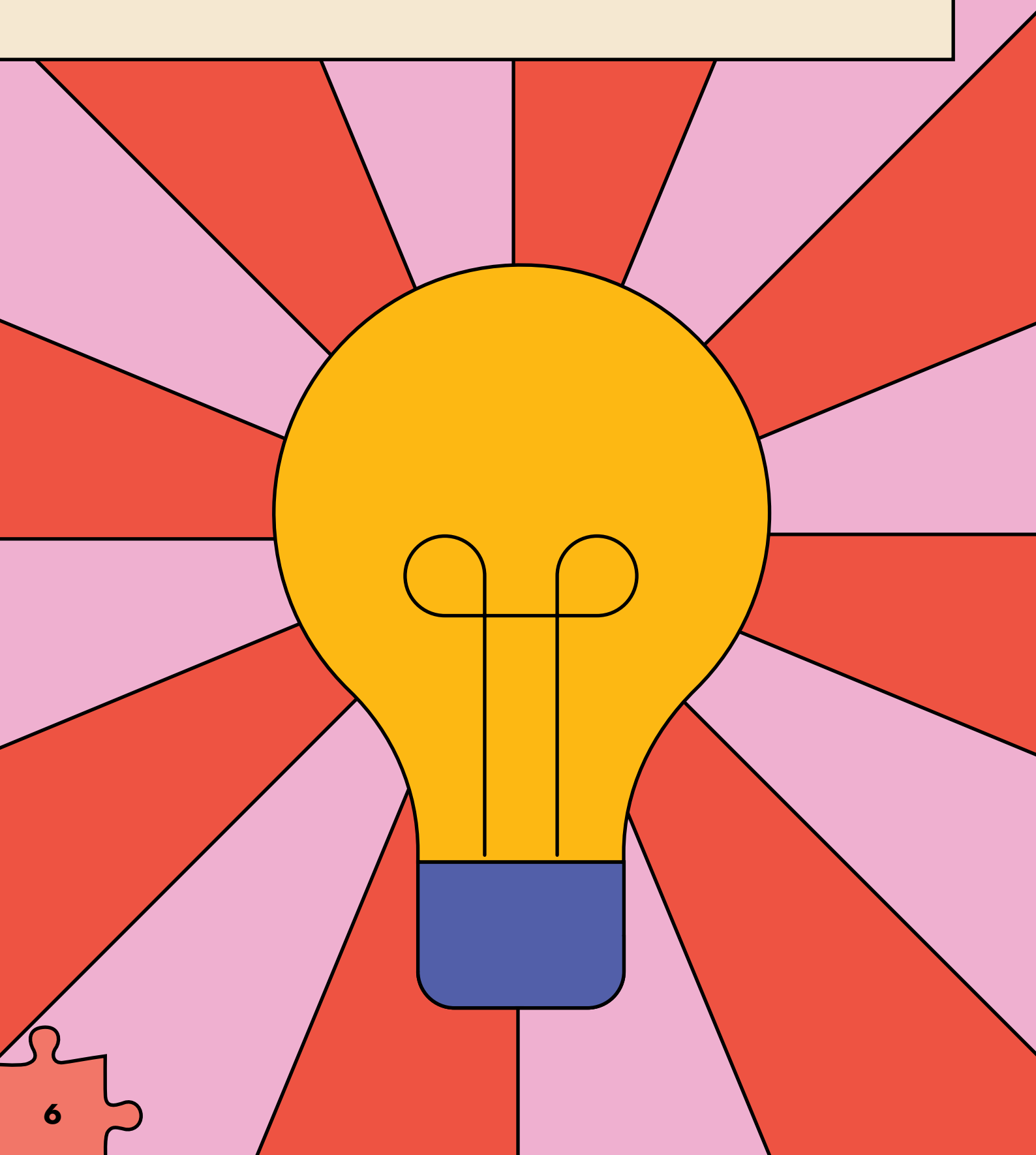
Lots of different people work together to help, support and protect you. All children have the right to be supported when things are difficult, and you should have help to do the things you enjoy. You also have the right to be safe inside and outside of your home.

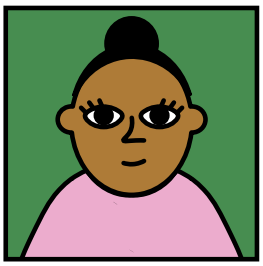
'**Working Together to Safeguard Children**' is a guide for all the different people who should work together if you need help. It explains what is expected of them, and what they have to do to make sure you are listened to. It also tells them how they can help you understand what help and support you can get.

Sometimes people will need to make decisions quickly to make sure you are safe, and this guide explains how they do that, including explaining to you what is happening and why.

This version of the guide is made especially for children and young people. We have made this because you have a right to know how the people who help you work with each other and what you can expect when you ask for help.

Definitions



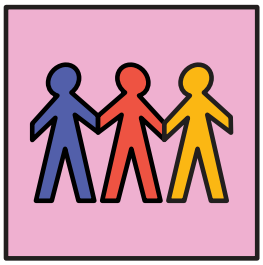


Children

means anyone who is under the age of 18 years old. It might seem strange to call young people or teenagers children, but we've used it here because that's how it's used by lawyers, judges and other people in the legal profession.

Help

can mean lots of different things depending on what you and your family need. It might mean help with getting to school on time, or help with getting involved with activities. It might also mean help for your parents or carers if they are struggling with something in their life that makes it harder for them to care for you.



Safeguarding

means protecting you from being treated badly, whether that is in or outside your home, including online. It's also about making sure that you are provided with safe and effective care.

Safeguarding partners

are your local council, the police, and integrated care boards who are organisations responsible for local health services. These partners work together to plan how people should be helped, supported and protected in their local area.

Practitioners

means the people working with you and your family, getting to know you and providing support. These could include social workers, family support workers, police officers, nurses and teachers.

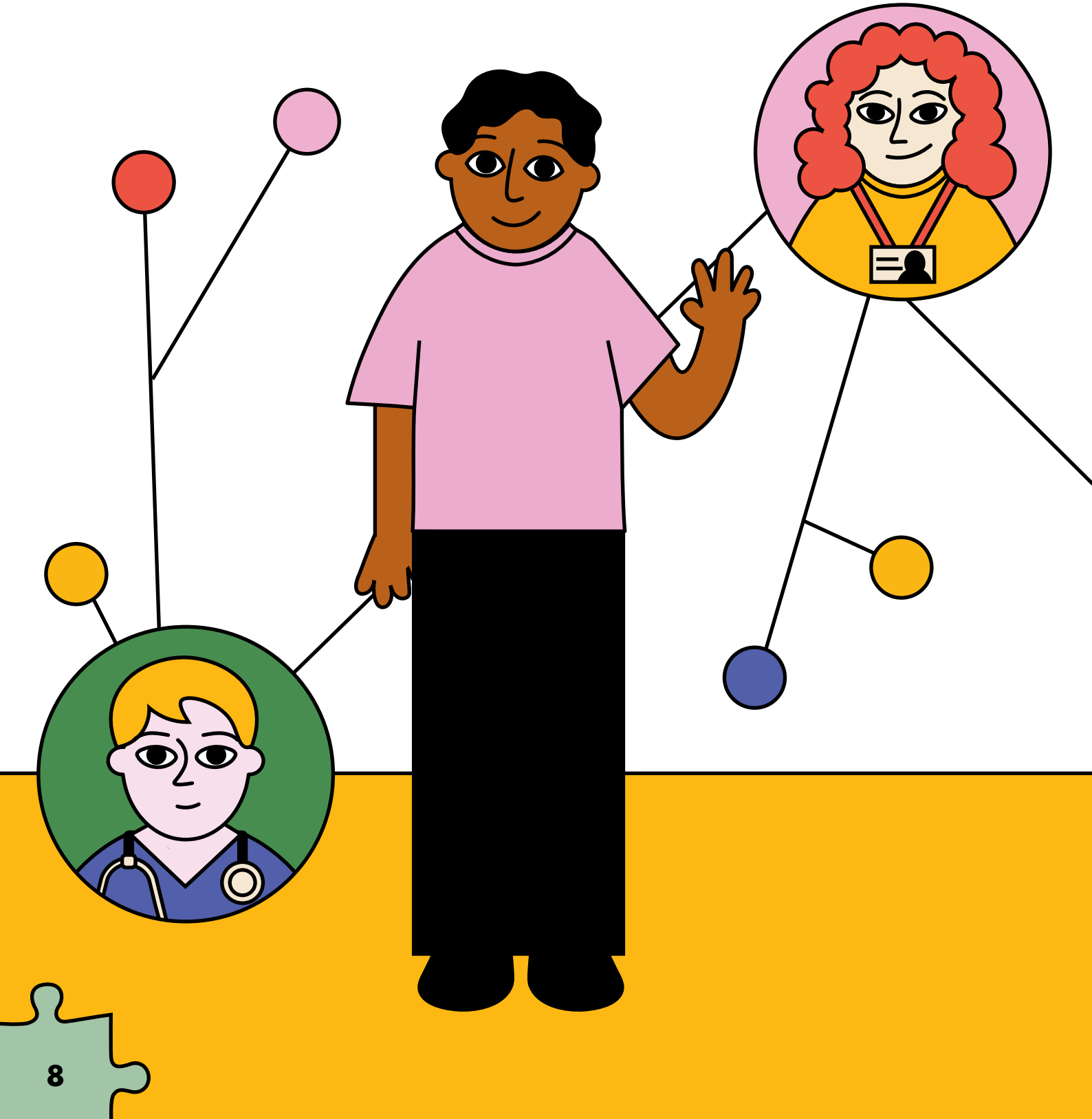
Child protection

means doing things to help and keep safe children who are being hurt or might get hurt.

You can find out what some other words in this guide mean in the difficult words section at the end of this guide.

Chapter 1

Everyone shares responsibility for you

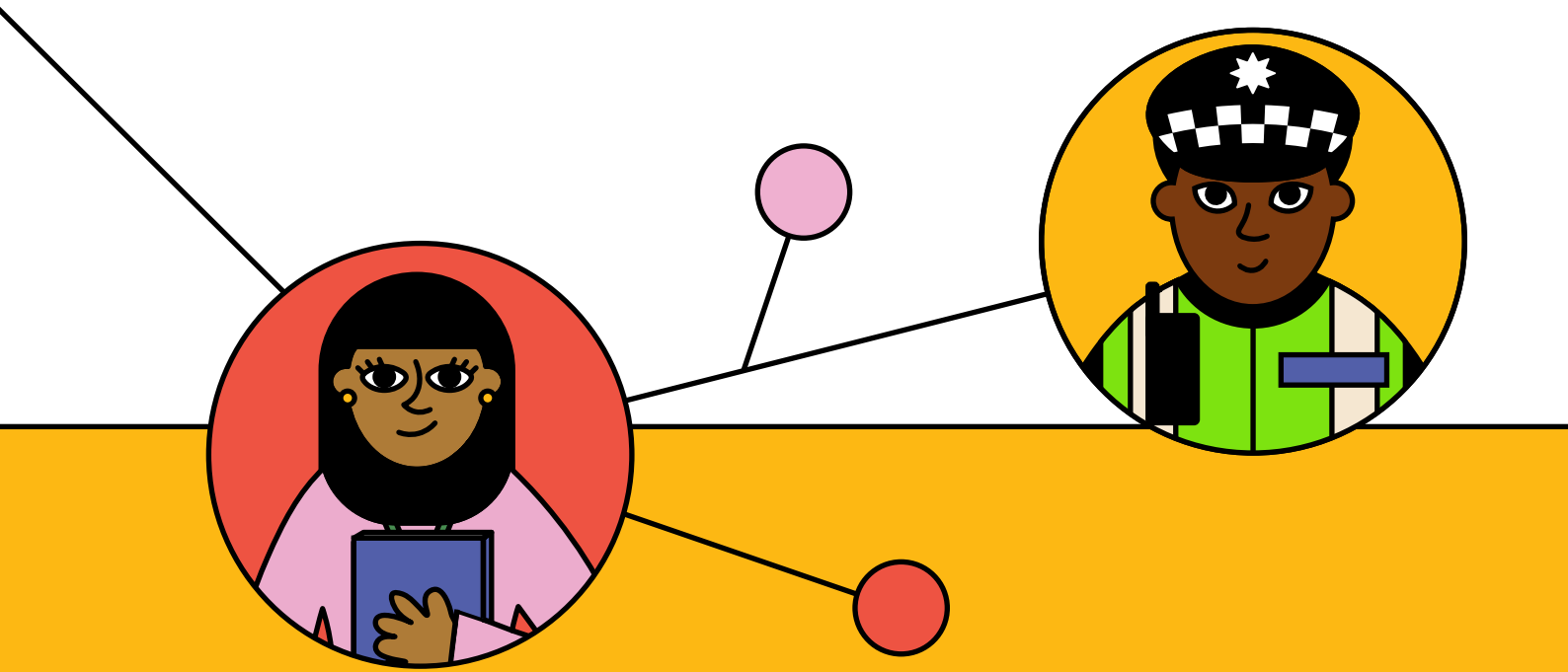


For you to do well, it's important that the people who help and support you (like teachers, the police or social workers) work together. We often call these people 'practitioners'. Practitioners know that they must work closely with parents and carers to give the best support to children. They should listen to you, hear what you have to say and put your interests first while helping your whole family support each other. These people should focus on what's best for you.

Six important things for safeguarding children and young people are:

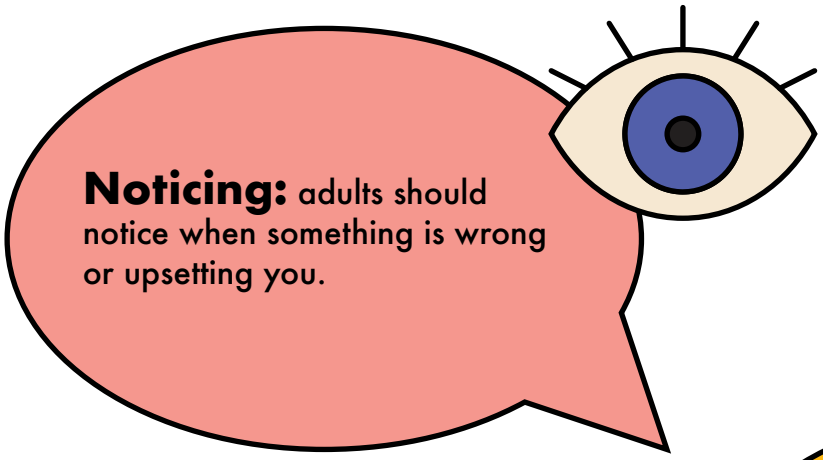
- children's welfare is the most important thing of all
- children are asked about their feelings and wishes, and they are listened to and responded to
- children's social care works with whole families
- it's best for children to live with their families, with their family networks or in family environments wherever possible
- local councils work with other people to understand what children, young people and their families need
- local councils are committed to acting fairly for everyone

'Children's social care' refers to the different kinds of support that children, young people and their families receive from their local authorities when they need extra help. More information on what councils do can be found in the **Children's Social Care National Framework**.



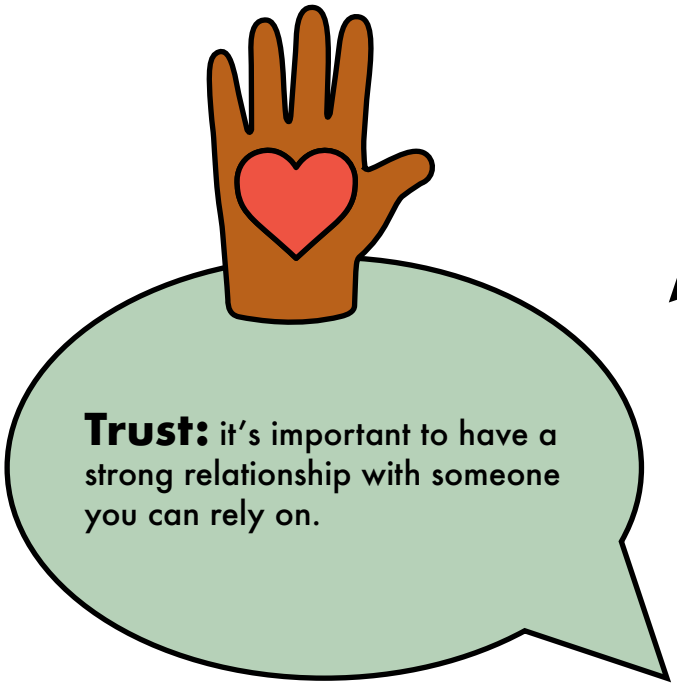
What you said you need

When we've asked children what they need most when it comes to help and support, you said:



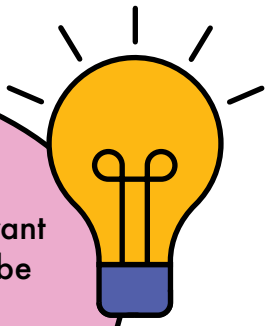
Noticing: adults should notice when something is wrong or upsetting you.

Listening and helping: you want adults to listen to you, understand what's happening, and do something to help.



Trust: it's important to have a strong relationship with someone you can rely on.

Respect: your thoughts and feelings are important and you want to be treated well.



Being informed and involved: you want to know what's happening, be part of decisions about your life, and understand any plans that affect you.

Clear explanations: you want to be told about decisions, why they were made, and what will happen next– especially if things don't go the way you hoped.

Support: you need help as an individual, as well as being part of a family.

Someone to speak up for you: sometimes you might need someone to help you share your thoughts and make sure your voice is heard.

Protection: you should always be kept safe from harm, abuse, and poor treatment by anyone, whether that happens inside or outside of your home.

How practitioners work with parents and carers

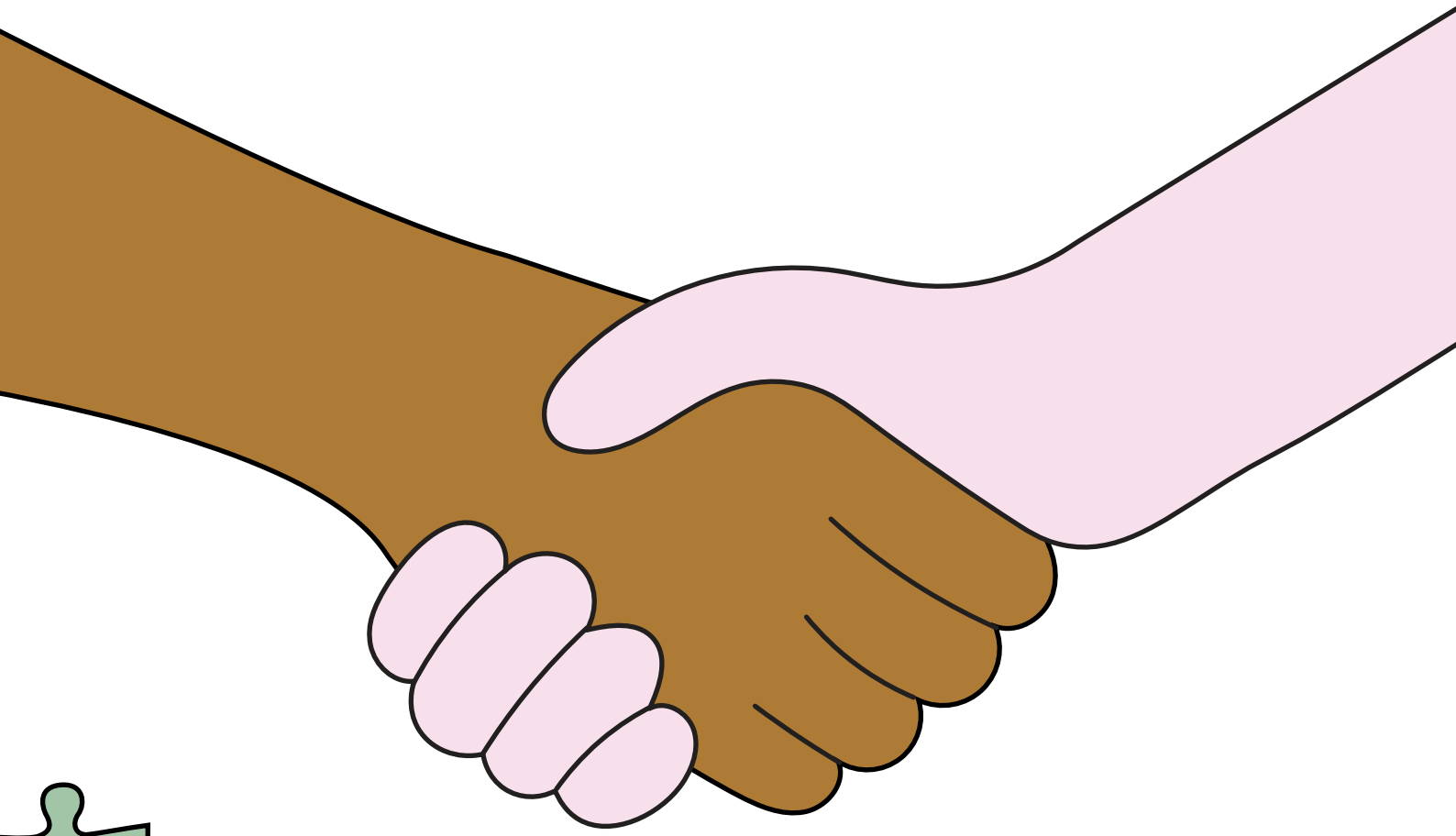
Social workers, teachers, and other practitioners work with parents and carers to keep children safe and happy. Here's what you should know...

Teamwork

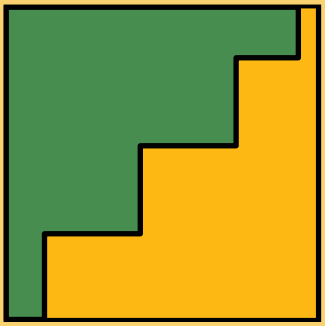
Practitioners should always work closely with your parents and carers to help them understand:

- what's happening and what help might be needed
- what support is available
- what should parents and carers do when it comes to taking care of you

When families face difficulties, practitioners work on getting to know you and your family and using everyone's strengths to make things better. Their main goal is to do what's best for you.



Working Together includes some principles for how everyone should help and support you and your family. Principles means ways of doing things. These include:



Building positive relationships

Practitioners build strong, respectful and supportive relationships with families by listening, focusing on strengths, being sensitive to different needs, and adapting help to fit each family's unique challenges.

Clear and respectful communication

Practitioners should make sure information is easy to understand, free of complicated words and provided in ways that suit different needs, such as translations or sign language.

Giving families a say

Parents and carers are involved in decisions by being told about meetings, given time and information to prepare, and encouraged to be supported by people they trust.

Listening to families and communities

Practitioners understand that it's important for families and communities to be involved in creating better services. They regularly ask for feedback to improve how they work.

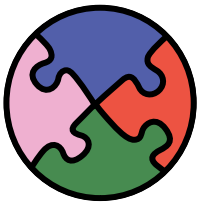
If you're ever unsure about the role of these people, or want to understand more about what's happening, it's okay to ask questions. It's their job to help you and your family understand how they will support you.

What you can expect from those who work together to help, support and protect you

Getting the help, support and protection you need can only happen when people work together. Everyone from the practitioners you see or speak to regularly, to the people who are in charge of organisations, are expected to work in ways that get the best results. By following these principles, the people who help and support you will be working to the best of their ability.

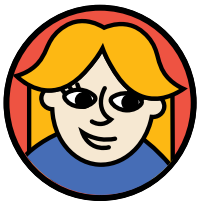
Like the principles for working with parents and carers, Working Together also tells the people in charge, the people who make sure that you get the help and support you need and the people who you see and speak to, what they need to do. We call these 'expectations.'

These expectations include how:



they work together

they learn from each other



they make sure there are enough people to help you

they make sure that everyone thinks about all the things that make you who you are

they all get a say about how to get to the best answer

How information about you may be shared

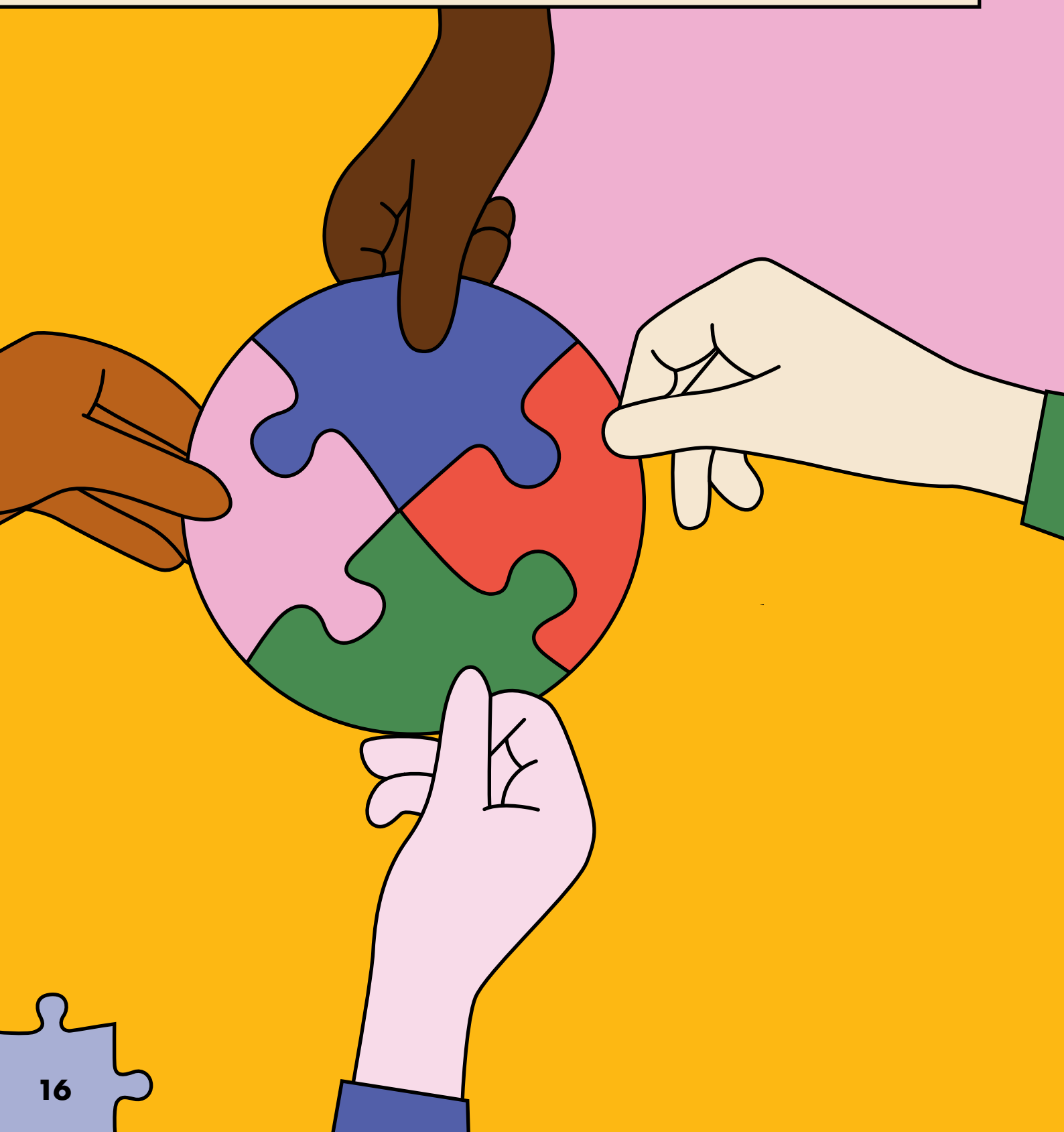
Sharing information can help adults notice when something is wrong and when problems are just starting. This could be something like if you were missing school a lot for a particular reason. It could also be when there are bigger problems where you need help straight away, like being in danger from someone you know. It's also important that everyone shares details when a child might be at risk. This could include a risk of going missing or if there's a pattern of risky situations involving the same places or people.

No one person can know everything about your life, so it's important for people like teachers, doctors, and social workers to **share what they know.** By sharing information early, they can understand the situation, and make sure you get the support you need, especially for keeping you safe.

Practitioners make sure that information is kept safe and only shared with people who need to see it.

Chapter 2

How people work together to look after you

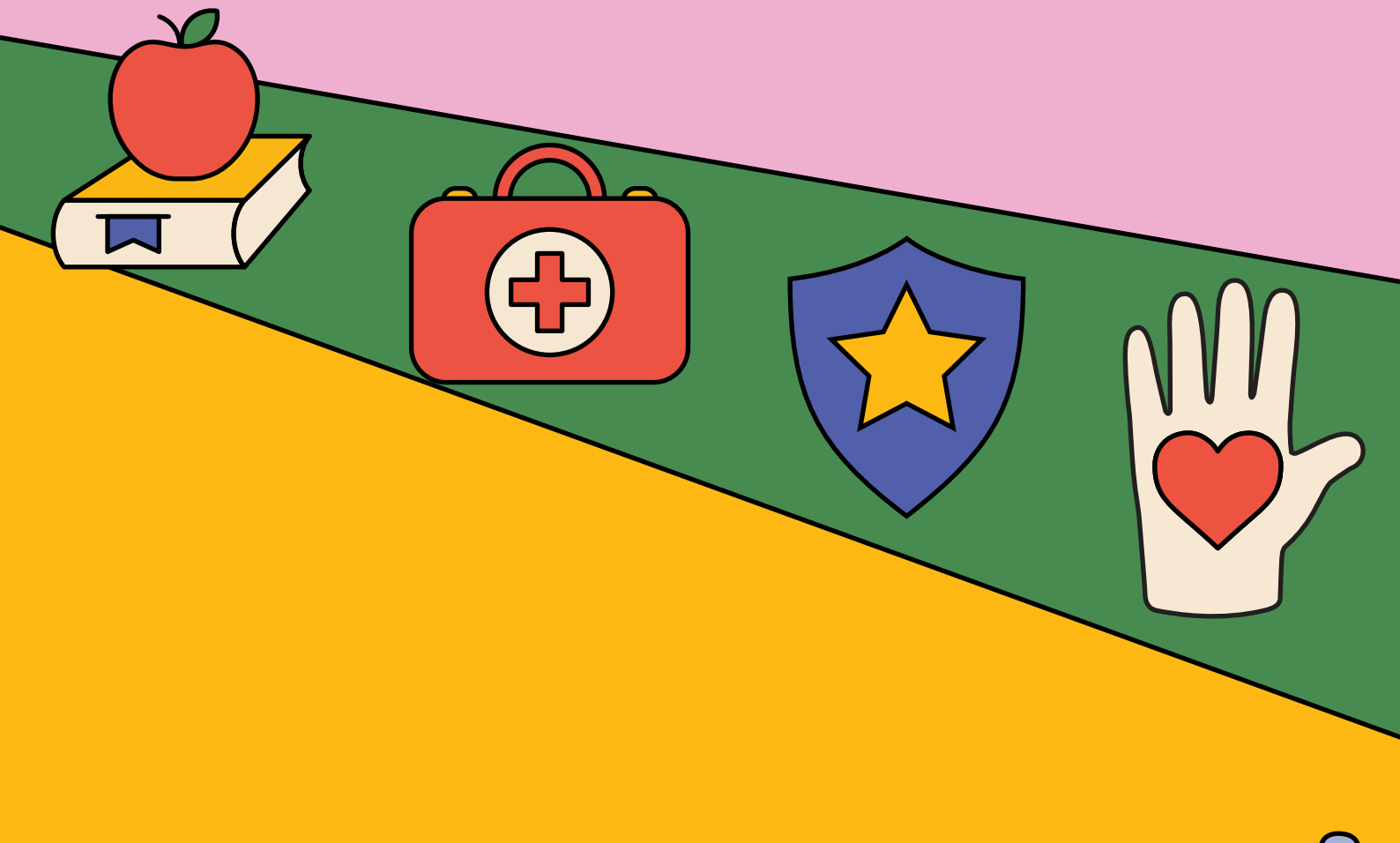


This chapter tells you what it says in Chapter 2: 'Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements' in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children', the longer version for adults.

The law says that the local council, the police and people who work in healthcare for children share a responsibility for making sure that all the local services help, support and protect children who live in the area. These are called safeguarding partners.

Local councils, the police and healthcare services have arrangements in place to ensure they work together properly. They also have arrangements with people and groups like schools, colleges, nurseries, youth workers, clubs, charities and after school clubs about how they all help, support and protect children. These arrangements help groups share information, understand how things might go wrong and how to keep children safe, and provide the right help to children and families when needed.

Good communication and quick decisions are essential for making this process work well. Leaders in every organisation are responsible for making sure everyone works together and that the plan for how everyone will work is written down so anyone can read it. This plan is called 'multi-agency safeguarding arrangements' and can be found on your local council's website.



Safeguarding partners and leaders

There are **three main organisations** in everyone's local area who make sure everyone is working the best way they can to look after you. These are the three safeguarding partners: your local council, the police, and people who work in healthcare. All of these organisations are equally responsible for working together as a team to safeguard children, and to involve other people in the local area to help, support and protect you.

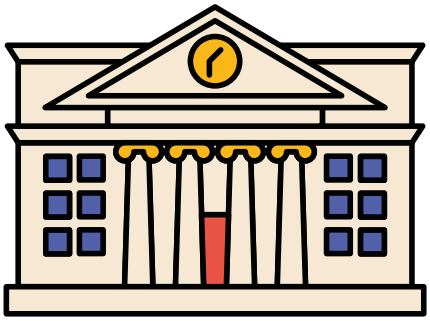
The leaders in charge of safeguarding partners work together **to make sure everyone involved is doing their part.** Leaders make important decisions and help make sure money and other resources are used well to protect children. They also step in when big problems need to be solved.

Teams, sometimes called safeguarding teams, provide the leader with the support they need to get the job done. This includes managing plans and resources to keep everything running smoothly.

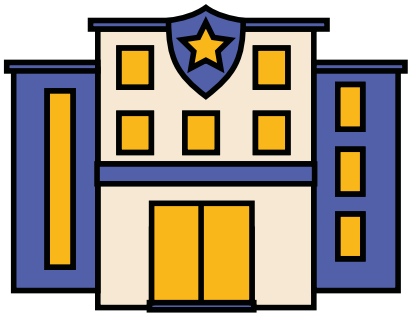
There are also people who are independent, who check how the system is working by looking at how different organisations **collaborate to protect children.** This is known as **independent scrutiny.**

These people help to make sure plans are followed, improvements are made, and that lessons from past mistakes are used to do better. They also make sure the **voices of children and families are heard** and included in decisions about safety and care.

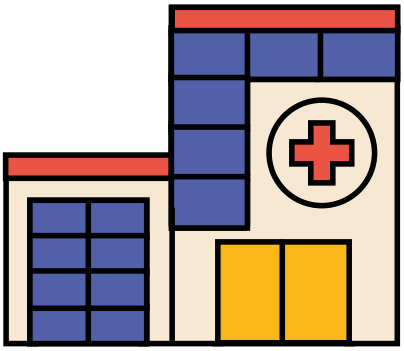
They also check how well the leaders are doing their jobs. **They ask tough questions and make sure the right things are being done** to keep children safe. These clear roles help everyone work together to protect children as best as possible.



Local council

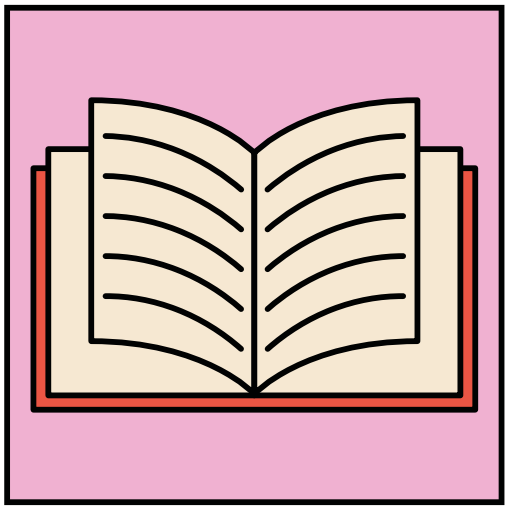


Police



Health services

The role of schools and education providers in keeping you safe



Schools, colleges, nurseries, and other places where children learn have an important job in keeping you safe and looking after your well-being. Teachers and staff often **build strong relationships with you** and might be the **first people you talk to** if something is wrong.

- These trusted adults can spot problems early, offer support, and work with others.
- Local safeguarding teams work with schools and colleges to make sure they're part of the plan to help, support and protect you.
- Schools have clear rules to follow, like those in a guidance document for adults called '**Keeping Children Safe in Education**', to make sure they're doing everything they can to look after you and give you a safe place to learn and do your best.

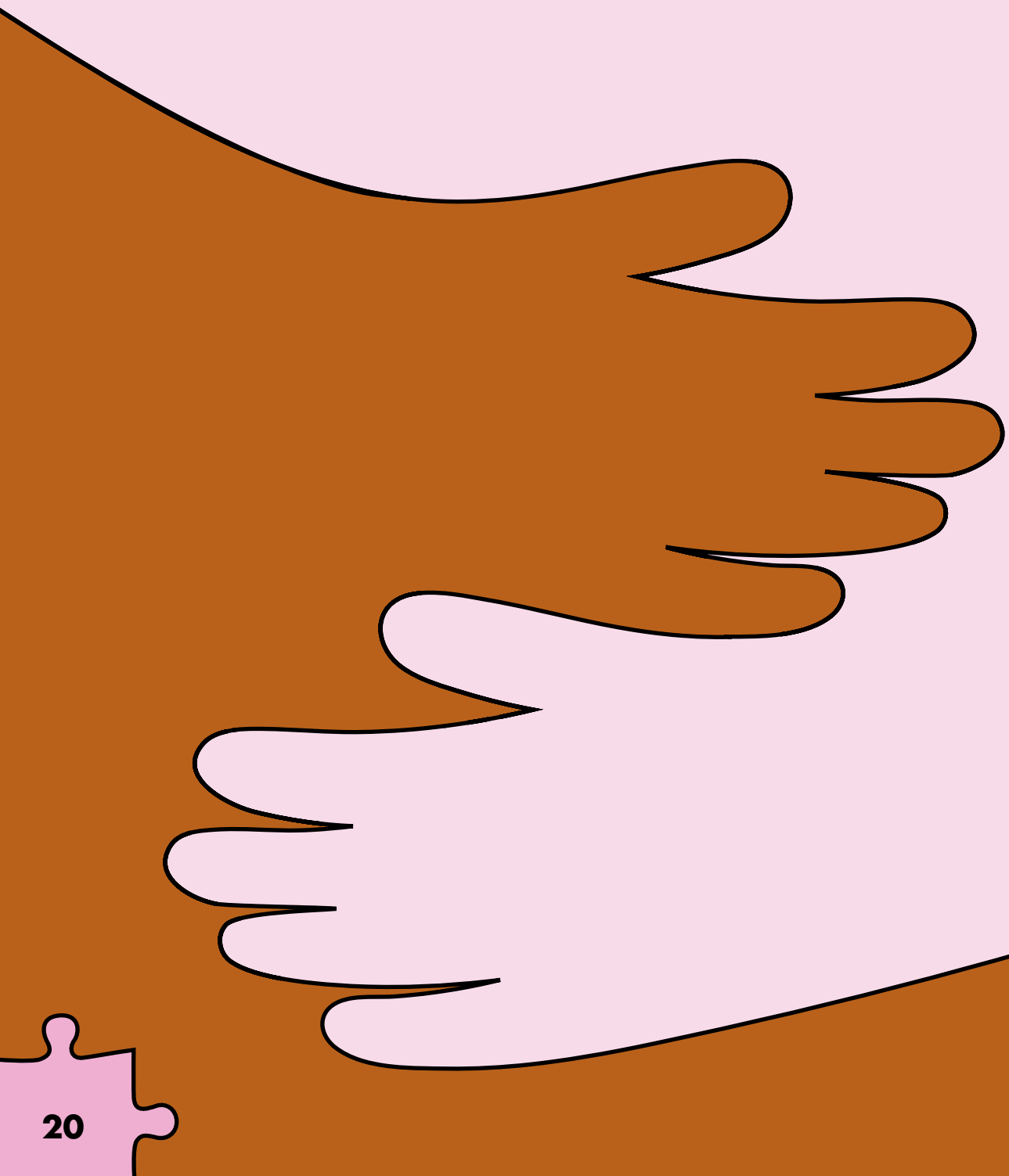
The role of sports and social clubs in keeping you safe

Charities, sports clubs, and other groups that run activities and hobbies for children also have an important role in keeping you safe. People working in these places **all have a responsibility to support you.** Just like teachers, the people in these places build strong relationships with children and might be the **first people you talk** to if something is wrong.

You can trust these adults, and they can help spot problems early, offer support, and take action to keep you safe. That's why these organisations are an important part of making sure children and young people are protected and cared for.

Chapter 3

Keeping you safe is the most important thing



This chapter tells you what it says in Chapter 3: 'Providing help, support and protection' in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children', the longer version for adults.

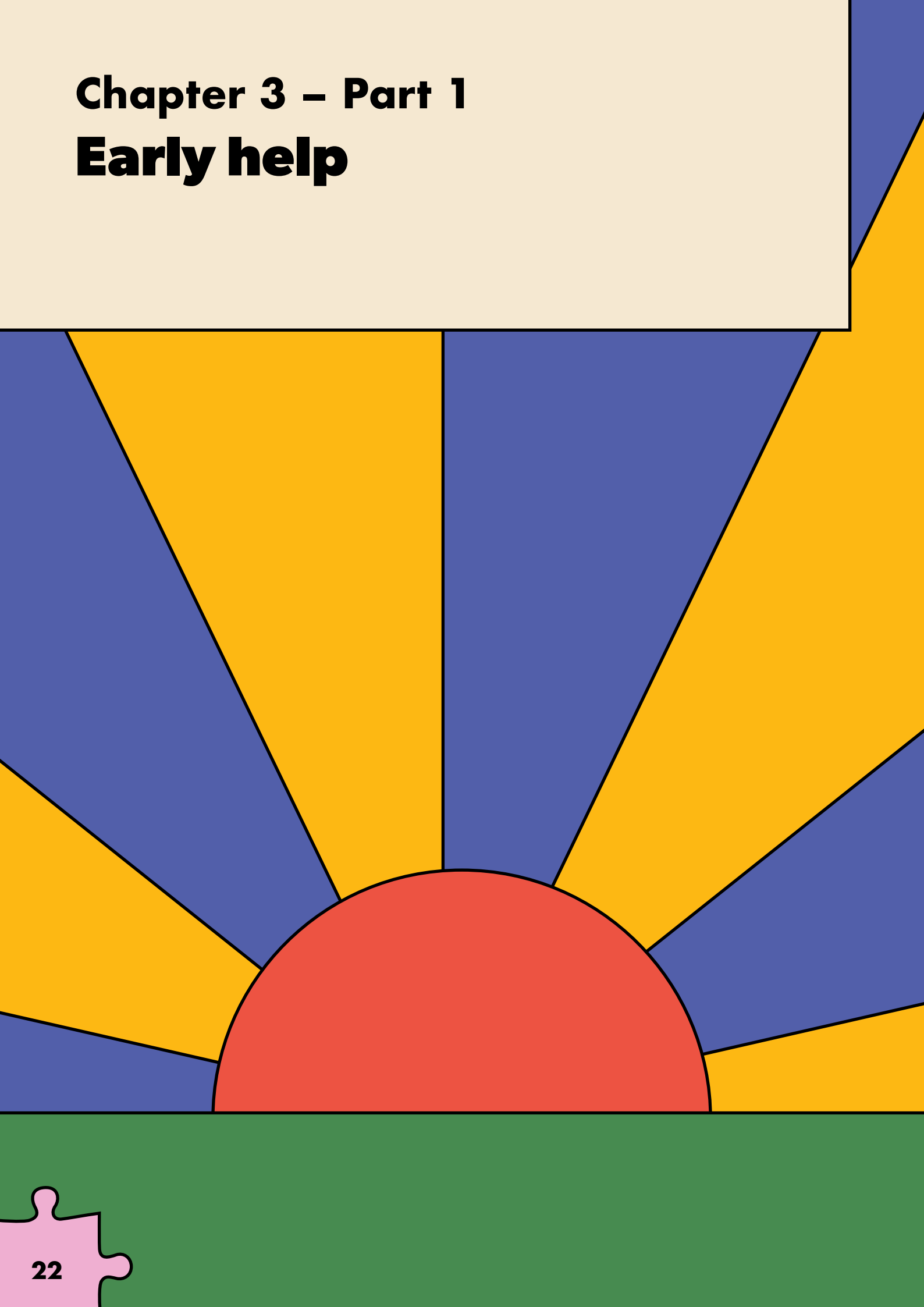
Every family can face tough times, and often can get support from friends, family, or services like schools, health workers, or mental health teams. But sometimes, **families need extra help to deal with bigger challenges.**

This is where different organisations and practitioners work together to provide the right support. They can offer early help and support to **stop problems from getting worse,** or step in with stronger help and support services when children need **extra protection or care.**

This teamwork can help to keep you safe and your family supported. This chapter will explain in more detail how these people and organisations work together.

Chapter 3 – Part 1

Early help



The best way to help you and your family get through difficulties and stop more problems from happening is by helping as soon as possible. 'Early help' is what we call it when **different services work together** to provide help and support as soon as they can.

These different services include healthcare and education, and many other areas too such as housing and community support services. Remember that there are lots of people who can help you and your family, and they want to do this **as soon as possible.**

Practitioners who work as part of the early help system collaborate to find out who needs help and how they can be supported. **They create plans and make sure that everyone is talking to each other,** and that everyone in your family is involved in making decisions.

Finding children and families who need help

Practitioners work together to spot when you or your family might need help. To do this well, the people who work for these organisations get training so they can understand what you and your family might need. Training also helps them recognise problems like abuse, neglect, or exploitation, and know how to help.

They also learn about how to support you if you have lots of problems at the same time, like mental health struggles, family issues, or problems at school.

Practitioners recognise that you might need early help if you:

- have a disability
- have special educational needs
- are a young carer
- have experienced someone close to you dying
- are getting involved in harmful behaviours, like gangs or violence
- often go missing from care or from home
- are at risk of trafficking, sexual and/or criminal exploitation
- are at risk of being radicalised – this is when someone starts to believe in extreme ideas and support the use of violence to achieve political goals
- are looking at inappropriate online content, such as violent videos, or developing inappropriate relationships online
- are dealing with family challenges like addiction, mental health problems, or fighting in the home

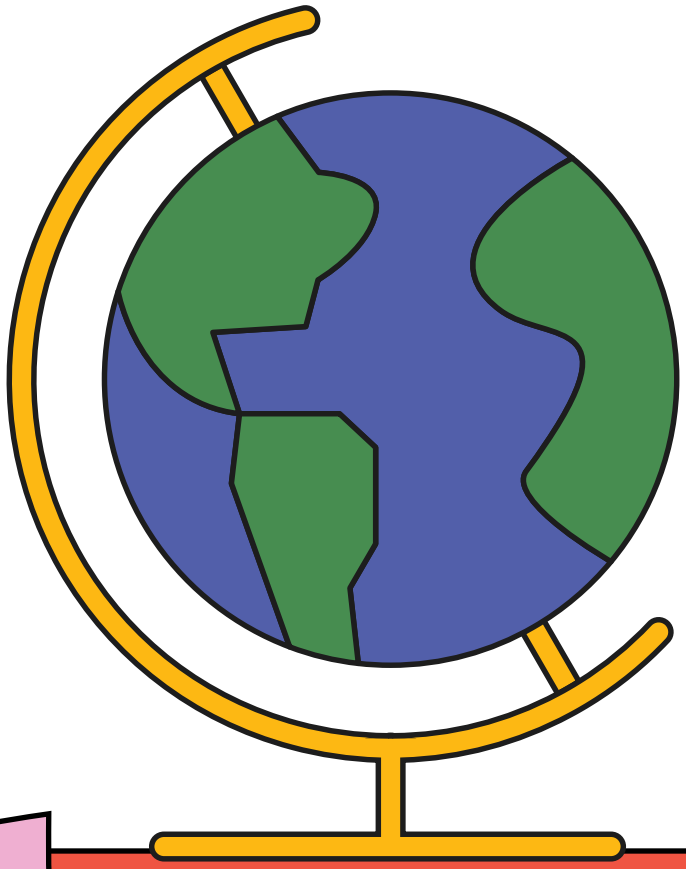
- are using drugs or alcohol
- are struggling with your own mental health
- have returned home to your family from care
- are living with a foster family
- have a parent/carer, sibling or someone else you love in prison or on probation
- have difficulties at school, like being frequently absent or excluded

By working together, practitioners aim to spot these signs as soon as possible and make sure you and your family can get the help and support you need to feel safe and supported.

How education and childcare can help

The law says that all children between the ages of 5 - 16 must be in full-time education, including support for any special needs. Education isn't just about learning – it helps you grow, feel good about yourself, and can help to keep you safe from harm.

If you're 16 or 17, going to school or having training is required until your 18th birthday. Local councils **make sure there are places for you in education or training** and pay special attention if you're not in education, employment, or training.



Because teachers and childcare staff see children every day, they're in a **good position to spot when something isn't right.** If you're not at school regularly, or if you seem upset or unwell, it could be a sign you need help. **Schools, nurseries, and colleges work closely with safeguarding practitioners** to share information and get you and your family the support you need.

If you're educated at home

Your family can choose to educate you at home. But if you're not in school and aren't getting a good education at home, it could be **a sign that something is going wrong.**

Schools need to tell your local council if you're taken out of school during a school term. They **should also share information** about you, especially if you are getting help from a social worker or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This is a plan that explains the extra support that you might need to reach all your goals at school and stay healthy.

How the right decisions are made about early help

Sometimes, you and your family might **need help from more than one organisation or service,** like education, health, or housing. In these situations, everyone involved works together to make an **assessment.** There is more information about assessments on page 32 of this guide.

The assessment will involve you, your family, and all the practitioners working with you. It's important to listen to your wishes and feelings, as well as thinking about your age and family situation.

If you have trouble communicating, you might get help from someone like an advocate to make sure your voice is heard. An advocate is someone who listens to you and helps you say the things you want to say, if you are having trouble explaining things.

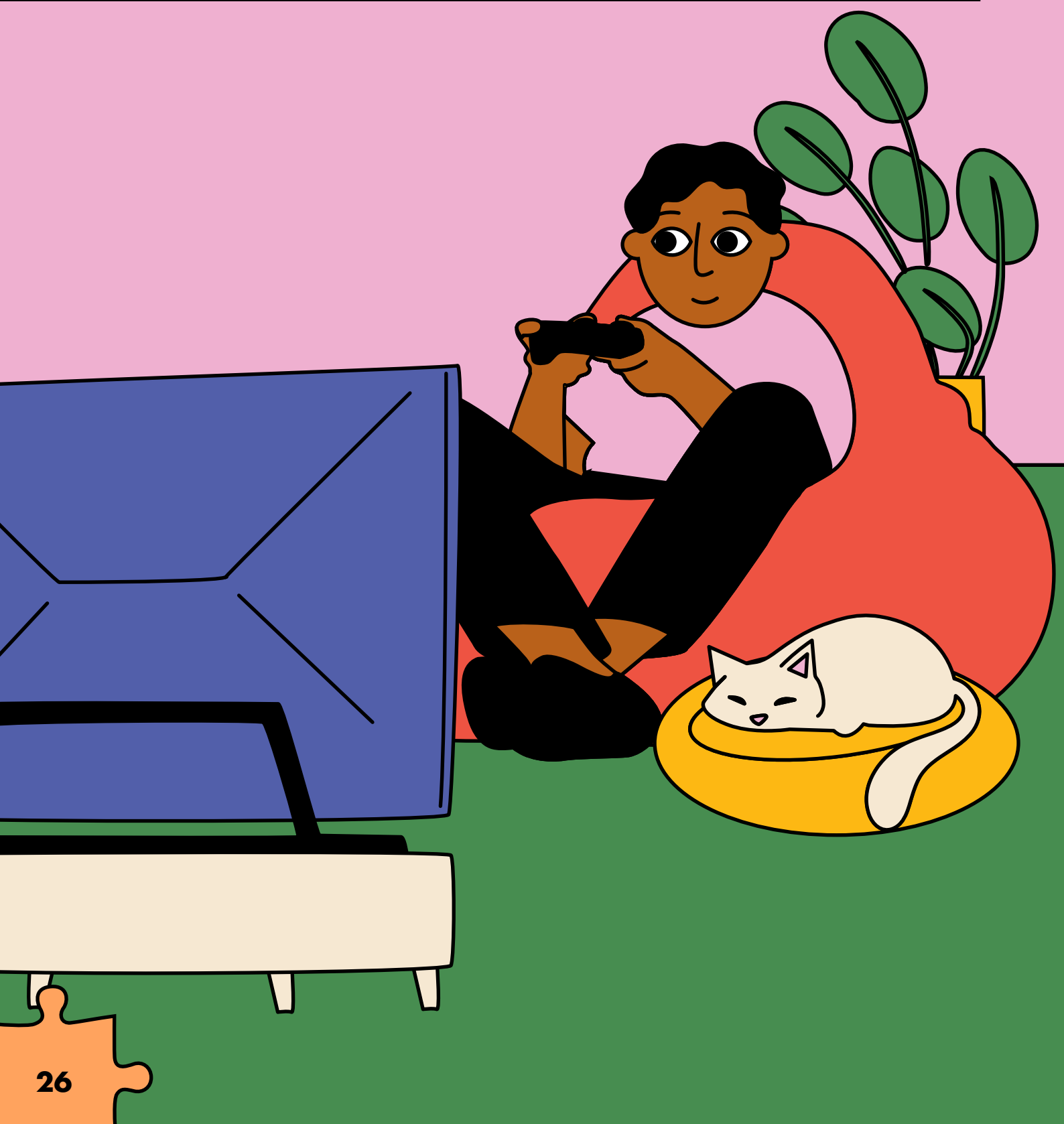
The assessment should think about what each family member needs and how their needs affect the needs of other family members. Practitioners should also know about any problems between you and your family. This is because involving your whole family in discussions might not always be the best thing to do.

The goal of assessment is to understand **any deeper issues** that might affect your well-being over time, as well as more immediate problems.

By thinking about good things as well as difficulties, the assessment **helps create a plan of action.** It explains what support you and your family needs to stop problems from getting worse, and it makes sure everyone understands what steps to take.

Sometimes, families may not agree to an early help assessment. If this happens, practitioners should try to understand their concerns and explain how the support could help. It's important to make sure families know that **help is voluntary,** and to let them know about the different things they can get to help.

Alfie's story



Alfie is 12 and lives with his mum and little brother, Leo. Recently, things have been tough at home. Alfie's mum is struggling with her mental health and isn't able to go to work. Alfie has been helping a lot by looking after Leo and taking care of the house. He's now finding it hard to keep up with his homework and he feels stressed.

Alfie's teacher notices that he has been looking tired, getting upset easily and not handing in his homework. His teacher talks to Alfie and learns a bit more about what's going on at home.

One day after school, Alfie and his mum have a meeting with the teacher so she can get a better idea of what's happening and to find out how best to support Alfie.

The teacher tells Alfie's mum about the Early Help team and explains that they are there to support families when things aren't going as well as they could be. The teacher suggests that Early Help could be beneficial, and Alfie's mum agrees to take the next step.

What happens next?

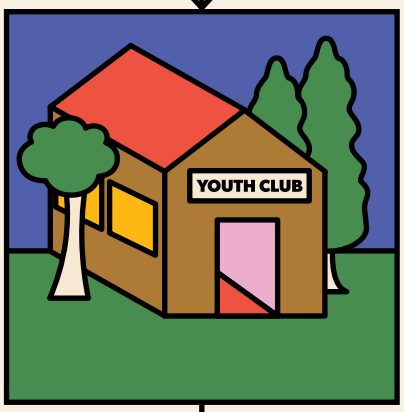
Talking to the family

Sophie, from the Early Help team, visits Alfie's family, listens to their problems and then helps them figure out what kind of support they need.

Making a plan

Sophie creates a plan with the help of Alfie's family. The plan includes:

- encouraging Alfie to attend after school homework and revision clubs to help him stay focused on his school work, while also giving him more time with his friends
- support for Alfie's mum to get counselling so she can get back on track too
- a volunteer to help with Leo a few afternoons a week so Alfie can focus on school, hobbies and spending time with friends
- arranging for a social worker to visit Alfie's family to see if they need support with anything else



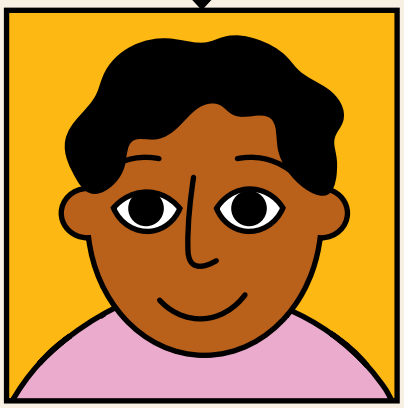
Getting support

Over the next few weeks, the plan starts to work:

- Alfie enjoys the after school clubs and has been getting his homework done on time
- his mum is starting to feel better with the counselling and has applied for a training course
- Leo loves spending time with the volunteer, and Alfie gets some time for himself

Checking in

Sophie checks in with Alfie's family every couple of weeks. She makes sure they're happy with the help they're getting and updates the plan if anything changes.



How Alfie feels now

After a few months, Alfie feels much better. He's doing well in school again and doesn't feel as overwhelmed. His mum is also feeling more positive and their home life has improved.

Chapter 3 – Part 2

Safeguarding children

Wherever you live, your **local council is in charge** of supporting any child who needs help. They will make sure that other organisations and people are working together to help you.

Local councils also have a responsibility to find accommodation for any child who needs somewhere to live if no parents, family members or friends can look after them and keep them safe.

The following sections will tell you more about how safeguarding works in practice. That means what people and organisations do every day to keep children safe.

Referrals

If someone is worried about your safety or well-being, they should contact their local children's social care team. This is a team in the local council. The person will **share any helpful information** about you and your family. If the referral is coming from a practitioner who has worked with you, they could include details from an early help assessment if one has been done.

The children's social care team will look at the referral and **give feedback on what they are going to do.**

Assessments

Assessments are for getting important information about you and your family.

- They help people decide how best to look after you and what support can keep you safe
- They also find out how your family network can help. Sometimes support can be given before an assessment has been completed

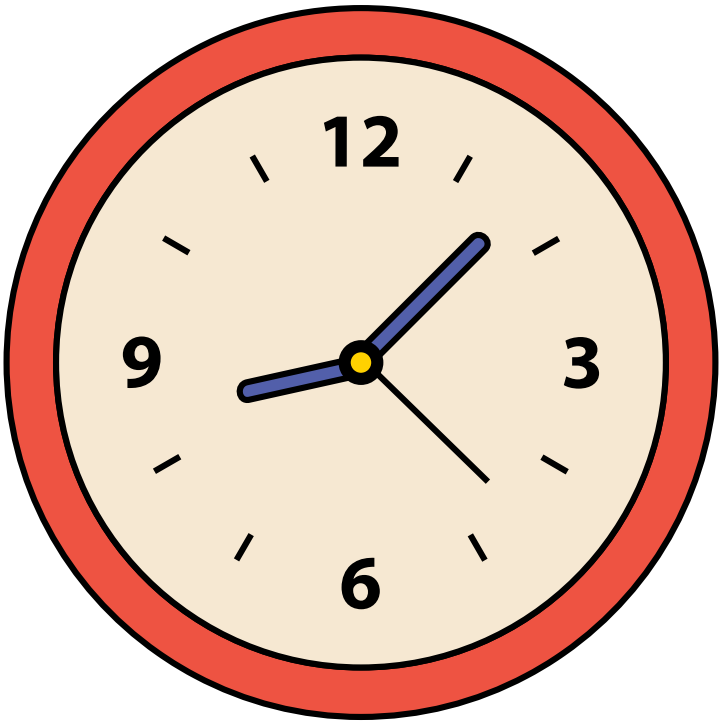
Assessments look at all areas of your life and your family environment. For example, they will look at:

- how well parents or carers can look after you
- what life is like for you and your family
- how well you are doing – this could include thinking about how you feel and whether you have any physical needs

How long do assessments take?

It isn't possible to say exactly how long it takes the children's social care team to make an assessment because each child's case will be different. However, within one working day of receiving a referral, the team will let the person who has referred the child know that they have received it.

At this time, what happens next will be decided. The longest it should take to make an assessment is 45 working days from the time of the referral (working days means counting every Monday to Friday, but not counting the weekends). Everyone will **do their best to make the assessment as quick as possible.** Lots of people might be involved including teachers, social workers and anyone who already knows your family is supporting you.

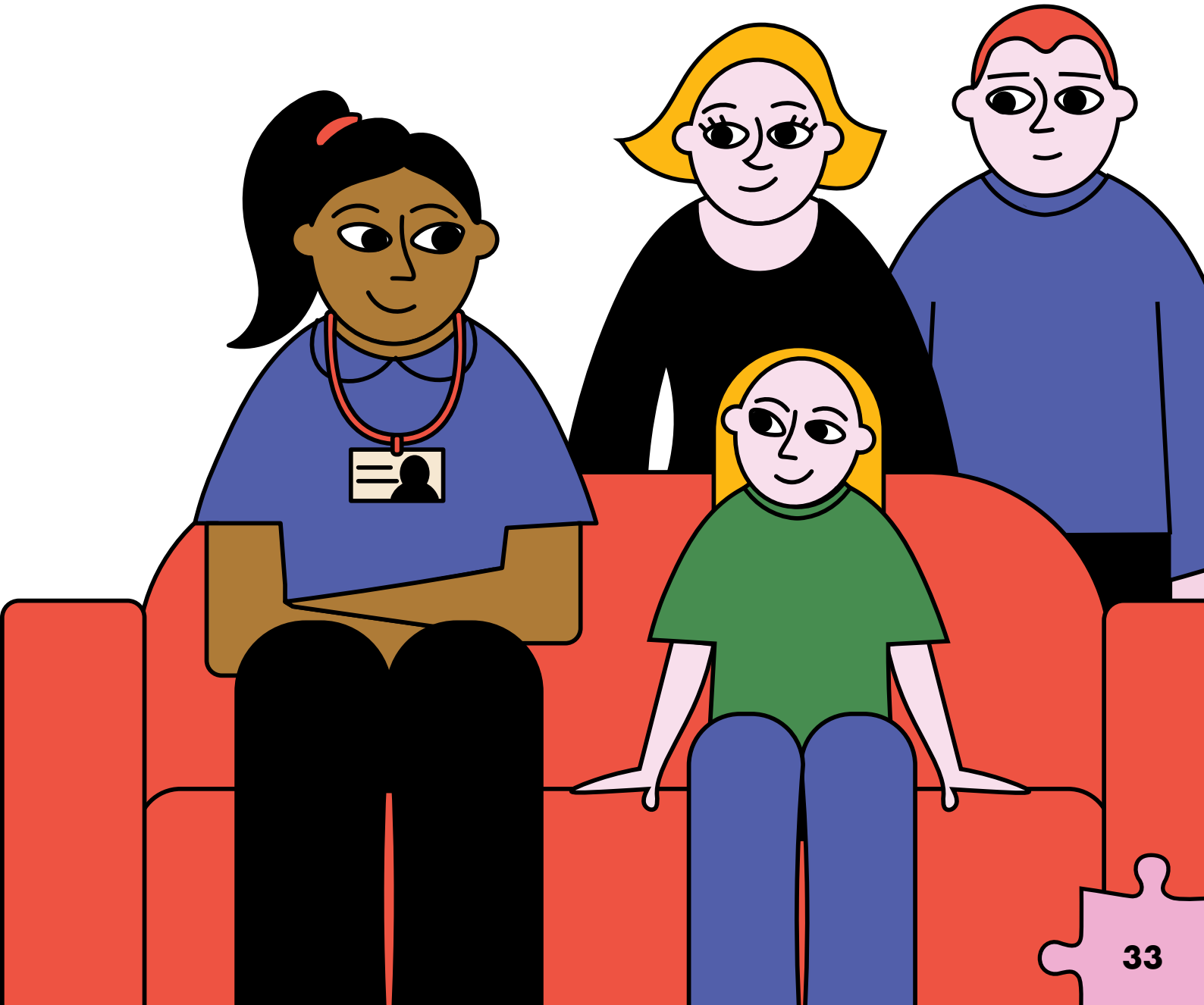


Focusing on your needs and the needs of your family

When assessments are made, they should focus on **what's best for you and consider your feelings and experience.** Decisions will consider your age, how you've developed, and any tough or traumatic experiences you've had.

Assessments will also **consider your experience with your family,** and other connections including friends and people in any other places where you stay and spend time. Practitioners will meet with you and your family to learn about what support is needed.

If a you have a disability, practitioners should make sure they have the right support including an advocate, to help you share your thoughts and feelings.



How a decision is made

Every decision involves all the necessary people **working together to use their expertise** and what they've learnt about your situation. Decisions will always be made **with your best interests at heart,** and consider everything that has happened to you.

Sometimes, as a assessment goes on, some decisions will have to be changed to make sure you get the support you need. If this happens, you will always be told about it and what it will mean. And you will nearly always be asked what you think about it, unless decisions change because you are not safe.

Focusing on what needs to be done

The person in charge of your care will work with you and your family to **plan what needs to happen.** Many of the services your family will get help from will be for parents or carers as they are the best people to support you. When this is the case, what the services want to achieve will always relate to **what's best for you,** even though your parents or carers will be the ones getting the help. Practitioners will visit your home to make sure everything is working properly for you.

Talking to all the people in your family when you need help or support is often really important. When practitioners ask all your family members to come together to think about how they can help this is called 'family group decision-making'. It is a way for families to come together and make important decisions about a child's safety and happiness and to help find the best solution for the child.

In these meetings, sometimes called family group conferences, families can use all the help and support from the family's wider network. It's important that everyone feels safe and has all the information they need to make a good plan.

These meetings are completely voluntary and an independent person, called a 'co-ordinator', helps organise the meeting, making sure everything goes smoothly and that at the end of the meeting everyone agrees what the plan is for help and this is written down.

Help for disabled children

When practitioners assess children with disabilities, they will think about the support that you need and the difficulties any of your family members face in looking after you. If you are disabled, all decisions about you will be made from information about:

- how to help you achieve what you want to
- what can help your family continue to care for you
- how you can be kept safe
- what practical support could be in place to help you and your family live a healthy and happy life

Help for young carers

A young carer is someone under 18 who helps look after a family member like a parent, sibling, or someone else in your family. Your local council can look at your situation to see how they can support you and your family. They will make sure you're not taking on too much responsibility and will listen to your needs and wishes.

They will look at the **needs of your whole family** and might combine what they think with other assessments that have been made. Schools will also record if you're a young carer each year to better help, understand and support you in school and with things like managing your homework.

Supporting children who may be harmed outside of their home

Some children face **harm outside of their home,** which is called 'extra-familial harm'. This can happen in places like school, with friends, in public spaces like the local shops or park, or online. The harm might come from other children or adults.

This type of harm can include many things. For example, it can include experiencing violence, being in an unhealthy relationship with someone, or being forced to do something you don't want to do by another person or a criminal group. **Children of all ages can be affected,** and it's important to speak up if you feel unsafe or something doesn't feel right.

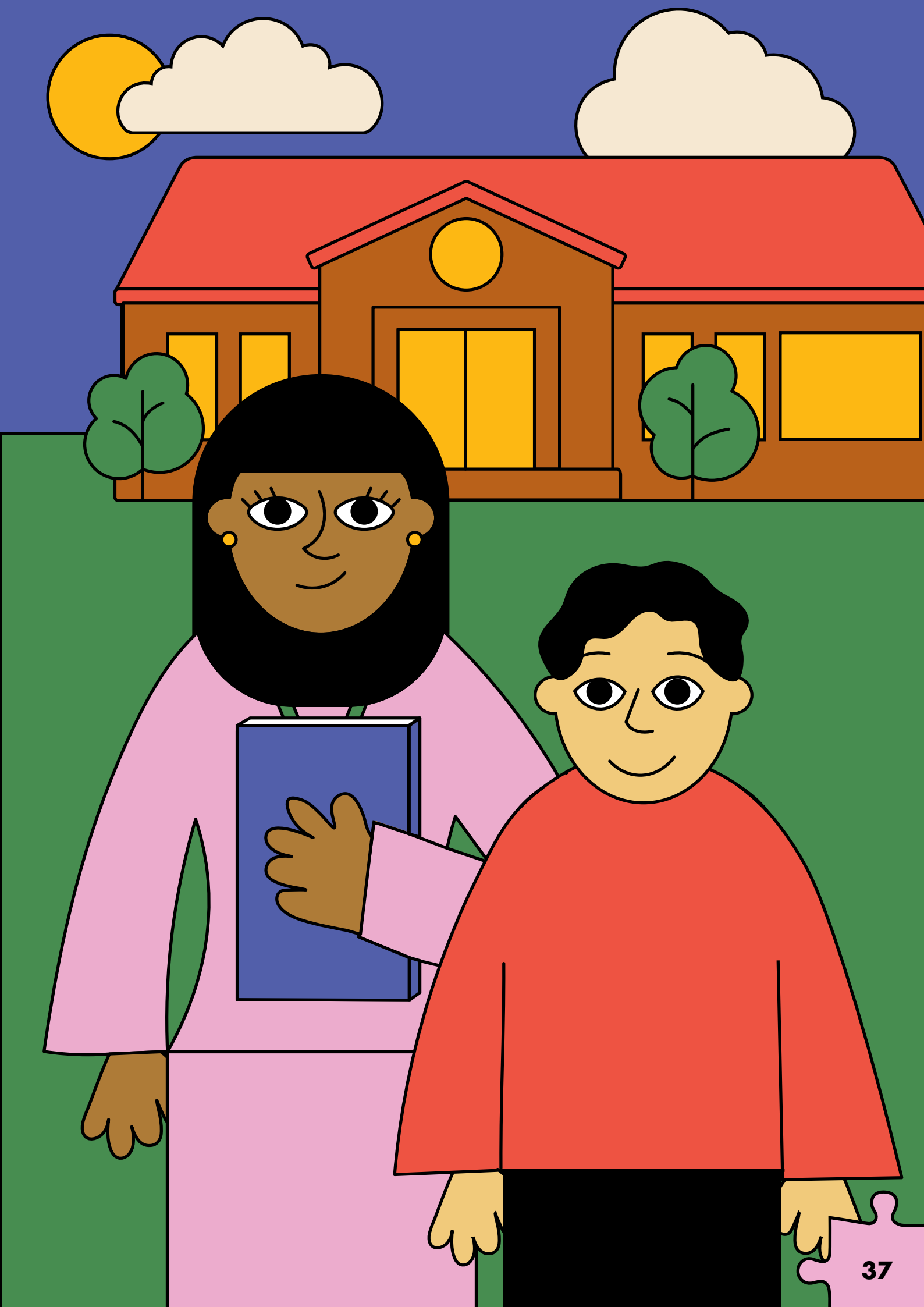
Social workers and other practitioners will need to get information about what is happening and think about the best way to keep you safe. This will include understanding what **makes you unique, your strengths, and any challenges you face both at home and outside.** They will think about your past experiences and how these might affect you. They will also look at how your friends, family, and community might influence your safety.

Your family will be included in the process to help them understand what's happening and how they can support you.

Supporting children who are in a secure youth establishment

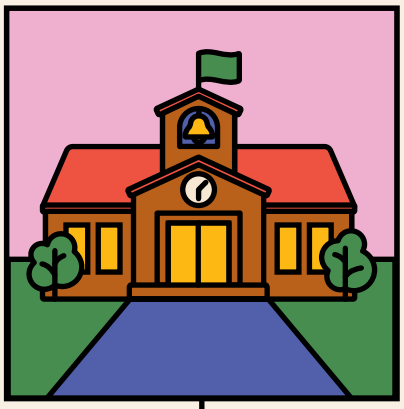
Sometimes children get into trouble and break the law. If this happens to you, you may have to go to court. The court may decide to sentence you to custody. This means you will spend time living in a certain place, for an amount of time decided by a judge. During this time you will meet with the people who will support you while you are in custody, and they will make plans to support your education, health and wellbeing.

If you are placed in custody in a 'secure youth establishment', the person in charge of that establishment will work with many other people **to make sure you have a support plan.** People from the local council will visit you and assess your needs before deciding how you should be supported.



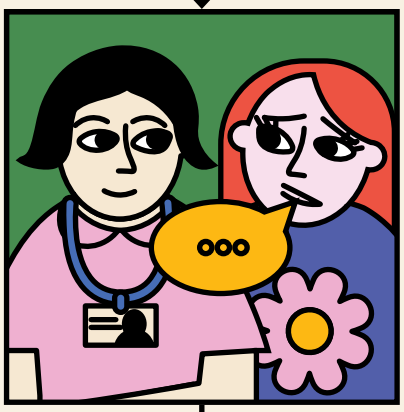
Zara's story

Zara is 13 years old and loves spending time with her friends at the park and playing basketball at the local sports centre. Recently, she has started receiving messages on social media from a friend of a friend. The messages are friendly to begin with but soon the person is asking Zara to share private information and pictures of her body without her clothes. At first Zara replies to the messages, but soon she starts to feel uncomfortable and unsafe.



Involving the school

Zara doesn't know what to do, so she tells her older sister, Aaliyah. Together, they report the messages to a trusted teacher at school who had asked Zara if everything was ok after the teacher noticed Zara wasn't her usual self. The teacher listens to Zara and reassures her that they will work it out together. The teacher also explains what steps they can take to support her and stop the person from contacting her again.



Talking to the designated safeguarding lead

The teacher agrees with Zara that they will speak to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead, sometimes called a 'DSL', who is responsible for how everyone at school keeps children safe. The DSL has a chat with Zara to understand what's been happening and how she's feeling so they can work out how to protect her and any other children who might be going through the same thing.

They suggest practical steps, such as reporting the messages to the social media platform and blocking the sender. They also suggest telling Zara's parents so they can get support from the school to protect Zara as well. Finally, they suggest contacting the police to help find out who is sending the messages so they can be stopped.

The DSL also speaks with Zara about what they can do at school to support her, such as checking in with a pastoral team member. They explain that they can refer her to other services, but Zara will be involved in any decisions.

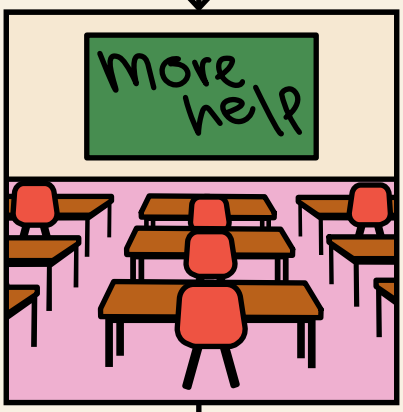
The DSL tells the other teachers that a pupil is receiving messages asking for private information and pictures of their body with no clothes on. The DSL finds out that several other pupils have mentioned the same thing happening to them. Through speaking to them individually, the DSL finds out more and thinks the messages might be coming from the same person.

Getting help from the police

The DSL reports this to the police who work with other people so that they can look into what is happening and who is sending the messages. They will plan what they need to do next.

The police may need to look at Zara's phone to help them find out who is sending the messages and stop them.

The police will also offer online safety advice and support Zara and her family.



Getting more help from school

Zara can talk to a school nurse or counsellor if she chooses – she may have to wait a while to receive counselling support.

Her family receives advice on supporting Zara's emotional wellbeing at home.

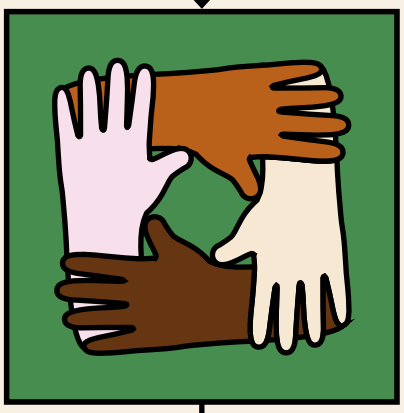
Zara is told about Childline which she can call any time, 24 hours a day, if she is worried about anything.

They offer to run a session for parents to help them understand how they can help to protect their children from similar things happening to them.

Getting help from people in Zara's community

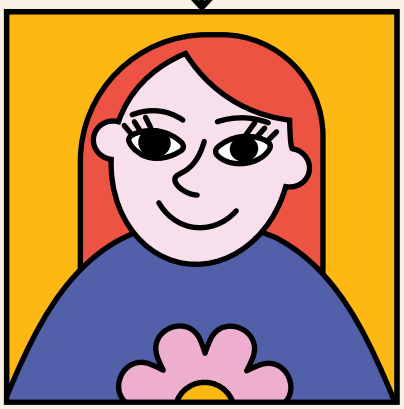
A local charity runs a workshop at school on online safety for all pupils.

With Zara's permission, her parents talk to her basketball coach about what's been happening, and he checks in to ensure Zara feels supported.



Getting help from other services

Zara's family feels reassured, knowing that help is available if they need it again. While some support is available straight away, Zara and her family are made aware that certain services, such as counselling, may have waiting times. The professionals involved keep them updated so they know what to expect.



How Zara feels now

With the right support in place, Zara feels more confident about using social media and knows that she can talk to the adults she trusts if anything similar happens again. She enjoys her time at school and playing basketball.

Zara feels relieved and supported. She knows she can trust the people whose job it is to help, support and protect her and she knows that she's at the centre of the decisions about her wellbeing. Most importantly, she's back to enjoying time with her friends and doing the things she loves.

Chapter 3 – Part 3

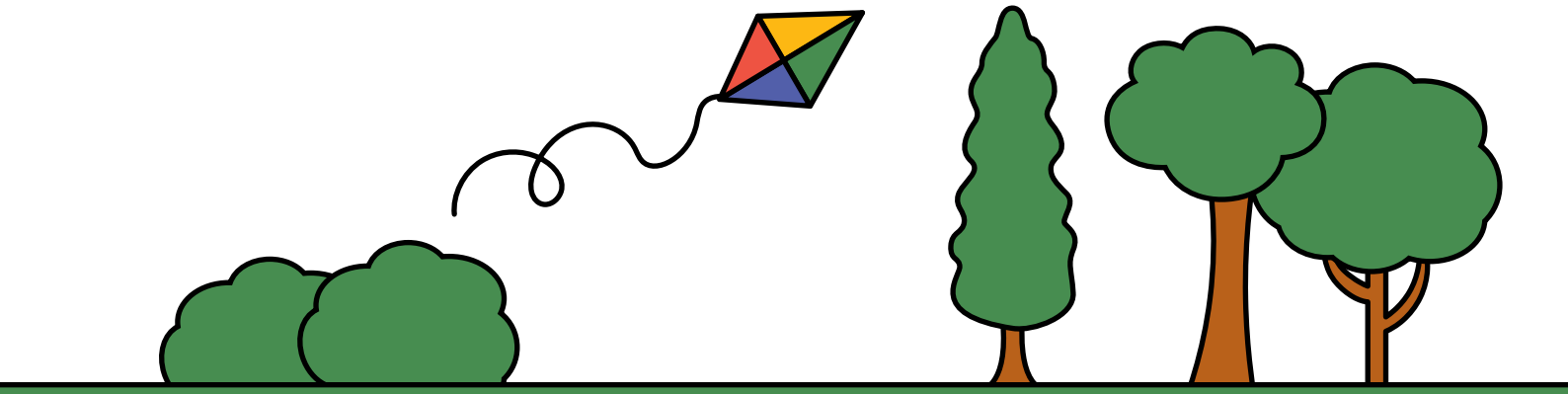
Child protection

Sometimes you need more help and support to protect you from harm. This should happen immediately and there are lots of people working together to do this.

'Child protection' is a term that refers to all the activities that the different people and organisations do **to keep you safe from harm**. Practitioners who are responsible for child protection will be skilled and experienced. The person who leads the assessment if someone thinks you might be harmed will always be a social worker.

If you are experiencing harm, whatever kind of harm it is, practitioners will **put your needs first**. The people working to help you will want to understand what's going on in your life as soon as possible. They'll pay attention to how you feel, even if it's shown through the way you behave.

These practitioners will also work closely with your family, to build trust and understand any challenges you might be facing. If there are problems, like someone in your family being controlled or hurt by someone else, they'll try to figure out how to help. Most importantly they will think carefully about how you can be protected, including whether you should stay at home or go somewhere else until it is safe for you to be at home.



The strategy discussion

If someone is concerned that you are being harmed, a social worker will invite some of the people who know you or people who will help to protect you (this could include a teacher, doctor, police officer or other health and education workers) to have a meeting called a strategy discussion. This is a chance for them to share information they have about what is happening in your life and **decide how best to keep you safe**.

After the meeting, the social worker will tell your parents or carer if they think you are being harmed or if you might be harmed in the future because of the situation you are in. The social worker will explain that they need to do a child protection enquiry. This is when they collect all the information they need to work out how best to protect you as soon as possible. The law says that the local council must always do this if they think a child is being harmed or might be harmed.

The child protection conference

When the social worker has all the information they need, they will call a meeting. This is called an initial child protection conference. Everyone who comes to the meeting will get a chance to **share the information that they have about you and explain what they are worried about**. Your parents or carers will also be invited to the meeting. They should be given information about what will happen and who they can bring. You may also be invited to the meeting but if you are not, the social worker will make sure your wishes and feelings are heard. At the end of the child protection conference, the person who is leading the meeting – who is called the chair – will ask everyone to agree what needs to happen next

This could be one of three things:

They decide that you are not at risk of being harmed, and they do not need to do anything immediately. You and your family may be offered support from other services.

They decide that you are not at risk of being harmed, but that you and your family do need help. The people at the meeting will decide what type of help is needed and how you will get it. This might be a 'child in need' plan.

They decide you are being harmed or are at risk of being harmed and need immediate help, and they will make a plan for this. This is known as a child protection plan. In some circumstances, they might decide that you can't stay at home safely and that you need to go and live somewhere else until it is safe for you to be at home.

The child protection plan

If the people at the meeting decide you need a child protection plan, practitioners work together to understand your needs and what they need to do to keep you safe. This will include deciding who the people are who need to be involved, known as the 'core group'.

A child protection plan sets out the things that will happen to make sure you are kept safe and well.

Within 10 days of the initial child protection conference, the core group will create a detailed plan to keep you safe. Within three months, the core group reviews the child protection plan to check if it's working. If there are no ongoing concerns about harm, the plan will end and your family may receive other types of support and help. If there are still concerns, the plan is updated, and another review is held within six months. The goal is always to ensure your safety and well-being, working with your family wherever possible to provide the best outcome.

If the plan doesn't work and it's not possible to keep you safe at home, the people responsible for the plan will consider whether you need to go and live somewhere else. If they decide this is what needs to happen to keep you safe it will include taking legal steps for you to be looked after by your local council. Sometimes people call this going into care, and it can include living with someone in your wider family or friends network or with foster carers.

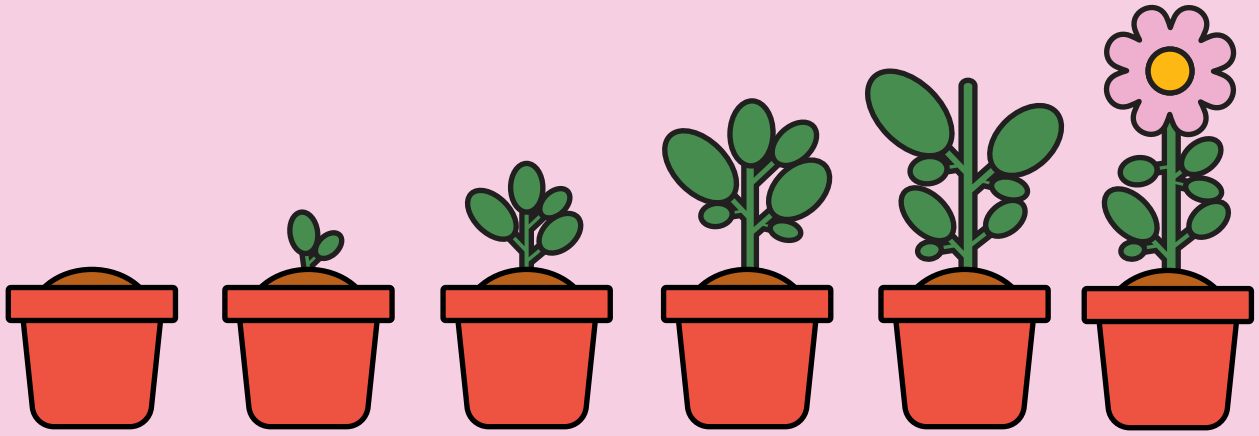
Sometimes children can't stay at home with their families. When this happens, it's called going into care or becoming looked after. Sometimes this can be for a little while and for some children it can be for their whole childhood. Going home from care is called 'reunification', and you will receive help and support then as well.

The aim of the child protection plan is to make sure that:

you are safe from harm

your family and your family network are supported

everyone is clear about what the different organisations can do to help you and your family



you will have a happy, safe and healthy future

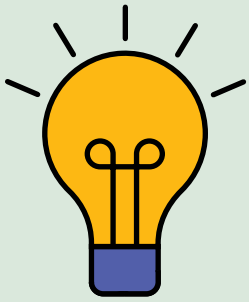
The local council will:

choose a social worker to be the lead practitioner

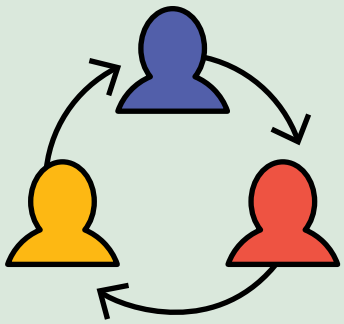
look at the evidence and decide what to do

make sure that everyone knows how long they have to carry out their tasks

Lead practitioners will:



help you understand the plan



work as an individual with you and your family

make sure all decisions and progress is noted down

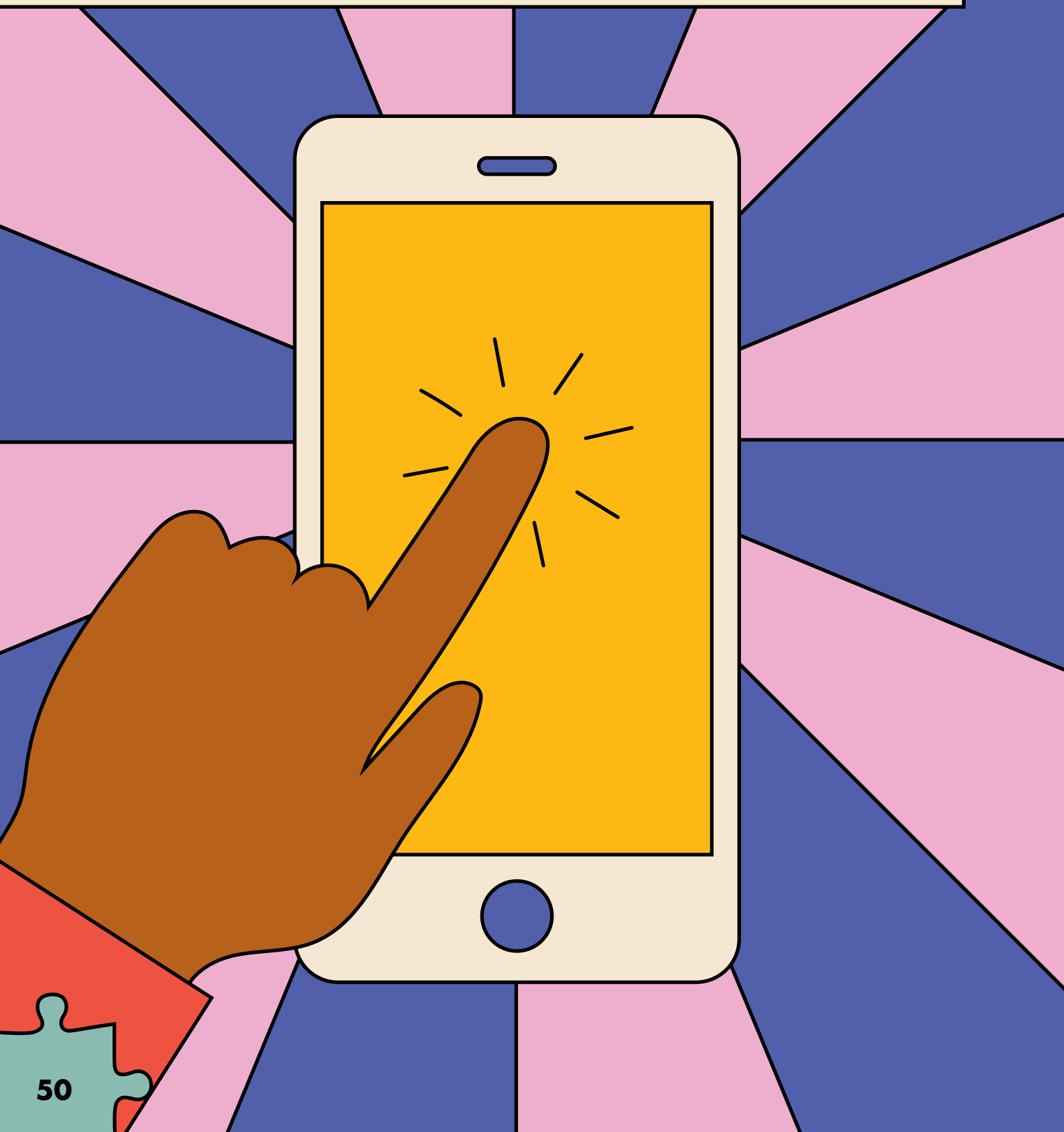
support all the organisations and your family members, making sure they are working together to keep you safe

If you are in immediate danger or in an emergency call the police on 999.

This guide is here to show you how different people and organisations work together to help, support and protect you. But it only shows you the most important things. For more information, you may want to see the original document we have used to develop this guide. You can find it at: **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023: statutory guidance.**

If you have any questions or concerns, you can speak to your social worker or another trusted adult like a teacher, nurse or police officer.

Useful links



You can also get more information, advice and support from these organisations and charities:

Childline is a safe, confidential place for children with no one else to turn to.

Whatever your worry, whenever you need help or just want to talk, you can contact Childline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year on **0800 1111** or through the one-to-one chat on their website.

Childline has a huge online community where you can get support from other children on message boards, as well as resources to help you through any issue you are concerned about.

The Children's Commissioner's Help at Hand team can offer free support, advice, and information about your rights if you are in care, leaving care, living away from home or working with children's services. This is to help you with any challenges you are experiencing.

You can call the team for free on **0800 528 0731** or visit **childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand**

NHS: Mental health services are free on the NHS.

To get urgent medical help, use the NHS 111 online service, or call 111 if you're unable to get help online.

Samaritans: You can access confidential emotional support at any time from Samaritans either by emailing **jo@samaritans.org** or by calling **116 123**

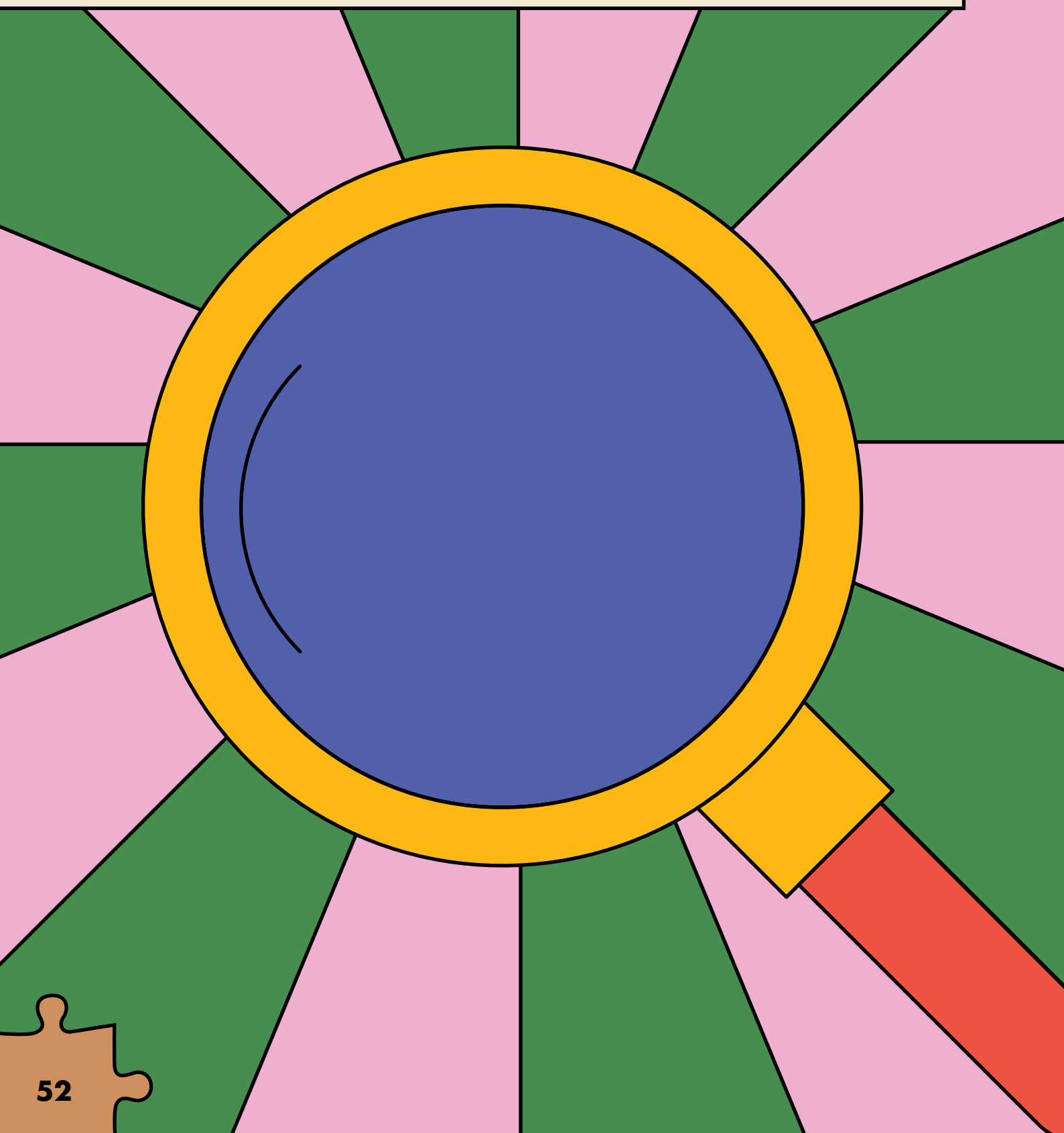
NYAS, the National Youth Advocacy Service, offer the **Safety Net** service for care-experienced children and young people across England. This includes advice and support from their helpline team and signposting to the service you need.

Contact their helpline advisers by calling **0808 808 1001**. They will listen to your concerns, discuss your situation and provide you with the help and support you need.

Pact (the Prison Advice and Care Trust) supports people in prison and their children and families.

The Prisoners' Families Helpline is open 7 days a week on **0808 808 2003**.

Difficult words



Abuse

Abuse is when a child is harmed by an adult, another child, or a group of adults or children. It doesn't only happen in person, it can also happen online. Sometimes a child may be abused and harmed in multiple ways. It can happen once, or repeatedly over a long period of time. Not providing children with the things they need and the love and care they need is also a kind of abuse, called neglect.

Advocate

An advocate is a person who can speak up for children. They help children take part in decisions that affect their lives and can help them voice their opinions in environments they might find difficult.

Assessment

An assessment is taking a look at something to understand it better, look at the risk of harm and decide on the help that might be needed.

Child exploitation

Children can be exploited when they are forced or tricked into doing something (for example performing sexual acts, stealing or carrying drugs) for someone else's benefit. Children who are exploited may experience physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse as well as neglect. Abuse can be online as well as in person and there may be more than one person involved.

Child in need

A child in need means a child who needs help and support to be healthy, develop well and kept safe. Sometimes children get help and support because their family also needs help. Sometimes children need help and support because they have a disability or other special educational or health needs.

Child protection

Child protection is part of safeguarding, and means protecting children from abuse, including identifying and stopping abuse that might happen or is already happening.

Child protection plan

A child protection plan sets out:

- how social workers will check on the child
- what changes are needed to reduce the risk to the child
- what support will be offered to the family

A group of practitioners is responsible for making sure that the child protection plan is supporting the child. The members of this group include the person who has been chosen as the Lead Practitioner. The child and their parents/carers are also part of the group. The plan is discussed regularly at a meeting called a child protection conference.

Children

Anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.

Child protection conference

This is a meeting for all of the people who are working with a child and their family to share information, look at risks and work out what needs to be done to protect the child if they are at risk of being hurt.

Child protection enquiry

When there are worries that a child might be hurt or in danger, something called an "enquiry" happens. This is led by a social worker from children's services. They will talk to the child, their family, and other people who know them to find out if the child is safe. The police, health workers, teachers and others who know the child and their family should work with the social worker.

Children's social care

Children's social care means the different kinds of support that children, young people and their families receive from their local authorities when they need extra help.

Custody

This is when someone is arrested and held by the police because they think the person has broken the law.

Early help

'Early help' is what we call it when different services work together to provide help and support as soon as they can.

Education, health and care plan

An EHCP is a plan that's put in place to provide extra support to children with special educational needs or disabilities.

Foster carer

A foster carer is someone who cares for a child as part of their family, providing a safe and loving home when the child's own family cannot look after them.

Independent scrutiny

Having someone, or a group of people, check to make sure that different groups working together are doing a good job in keeping children safe.

Integrated Care Board

Organisations that plan local health services for people, including children.

Lead practitioner

A lead practitioner in children's social care is a lead person who arranges support for a child and their family. They are an important point of contact for the child and family.

Multi-agency

Different organisations and individuals, working together to help, support and protect children and their families.

Practitioner

A person who works with children and their families including social workers, teachers, doctors, nurses and police officers.

Reunification

Reunification is when a child returns home to live with their family after being looked after somewhere else, also known as being in care.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is:

- Protecting children from being treated badly
- Making sure children's health and development is a priority
- Making sure that children are growing up with safe and effective care
- Helping children to have the best life chances as they grow up

Safeguarding partner

There are three main organisations in the area where you live who make sure everyone else is working the best way they can to look after you. These are the three safeguarding partners: your local council, the police, and Integrated Care Boards.

Significant harm

Harm is hurting or being mean to a child and stopping them from growing, learning, or feeling good. Harm can be called 'significant harm' when comparing a child's health and development with what might be expected of a similar child. Physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect are all types of significant harm.

Social worker

A social worker is a person who helps children and families in need. They work to protect children, stop abuse, and make sure that children's voices are heard.

Strategy discussion

A strategy discussion, sometimes called a strategy meeting, is where practitioners get together to decide if a child protection enquiry needs to happen. This kind of meeting is held when there are concerns that a child is in danger.

Trafficking

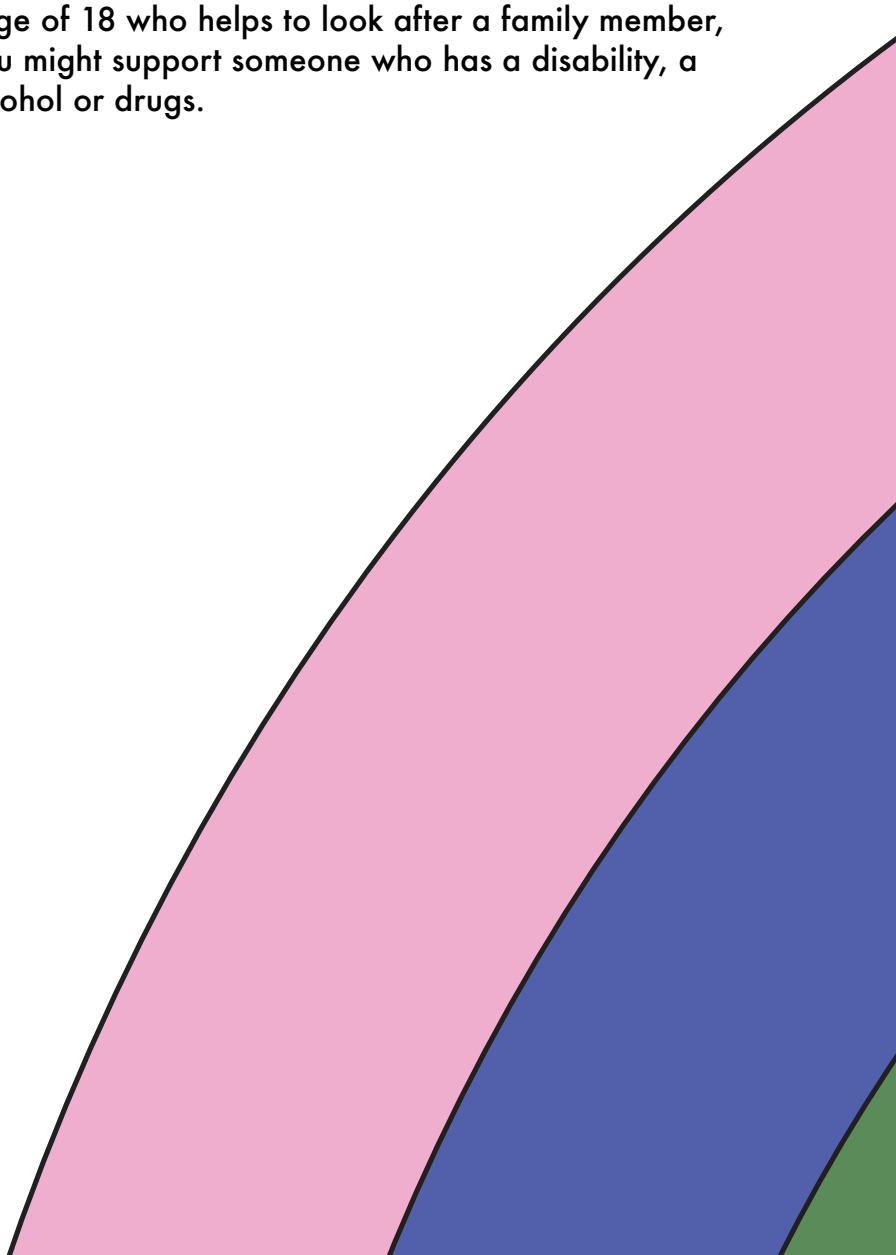
This is where children and young people are tricked, forced or persuaded to leave their homes and are moved, either within their own country or to a different country, and then exploited, forced to work or sold.

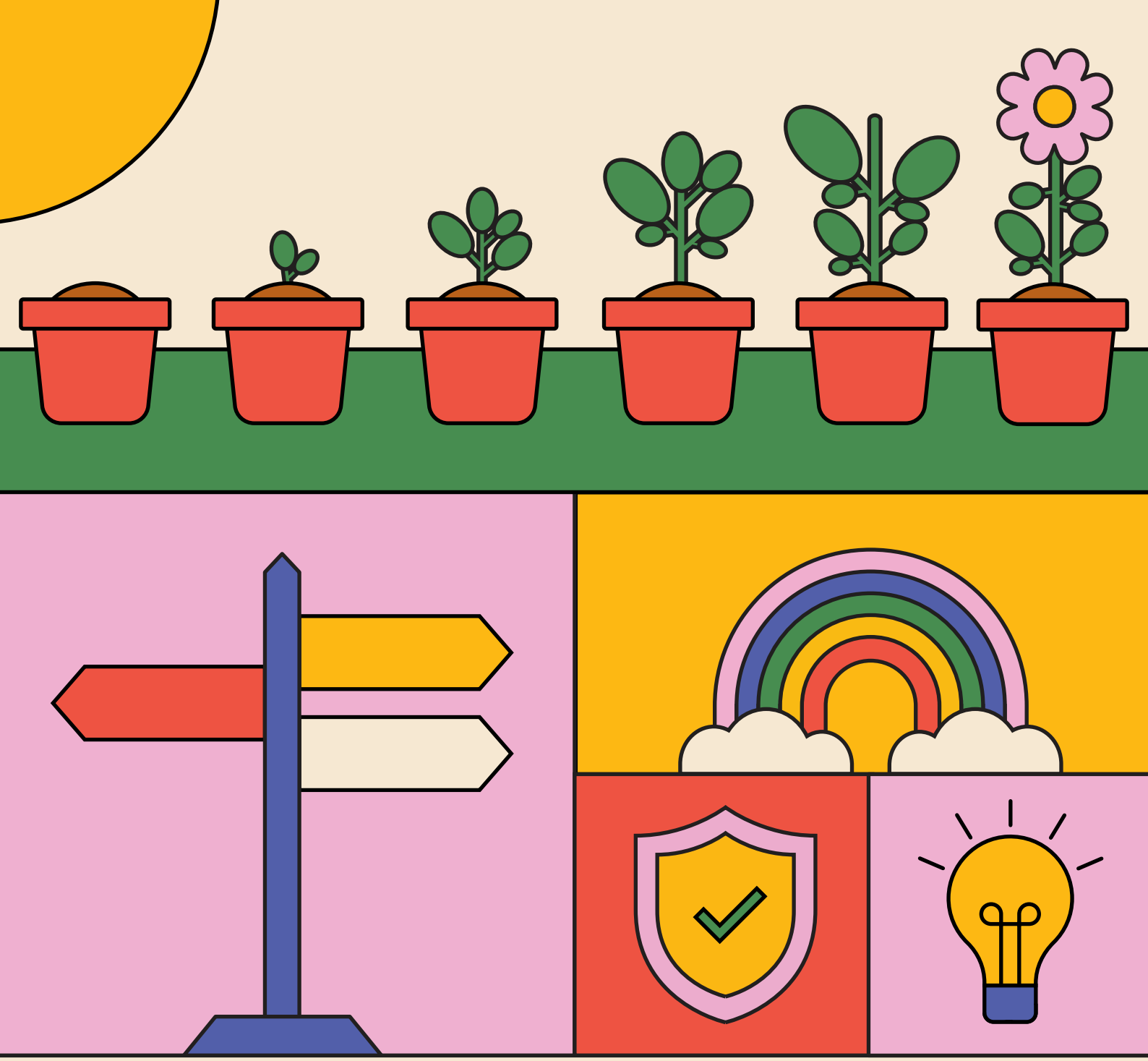
Welfare

Welfare is the health and happiness of a child. This could include their development and their education, friends and family environment.

Young carer

A young carer is someone under the age of 18 who helps to look after a family member, relative or friend. As a young carer you might support someone who has a disability, a long-term illness, or a problem with alcohol or drugs.





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