SBNI Child Safeguarding Learning and Development Strategy and Framework 2026 - 2030

Date	10 November 2025

Date for Review	Every four years subject to SBNI Priorities

Purpose	To contribute to the improvement of training and education in child protection and safeguarding in Northern Ireland. This strategy and framework set out the key minimum learning outcomes to equip staff/volunteers in organisations with the skills, knowledge and competences required to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people within the remit of their roles and responsibilities.

Signature:	
	SBNI Independent Chair

Content

1. Foreword

As Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) I welcome the opportunity to present the revised '**SBNI Child Safeguarding Learning and Development Strategy and Framework 2026-2030'.**

The Learning and Development Strategy and Framework is informed by the SBNI's Strategic Plan and its associated vision statement, function and values. It contributes to the delivery of the SBNI's Business Plan priority 1: 'providing leadership and setting direction'; complements the key policy framework 'Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland'[1]; and reflects developments in practice of which practitioners are required to be aware.

Similar to the previous strategy and framework, it builds upon existing safeguarding training, sets minimum training standards and provides a graduated framework on four levels, for agencies to use when planning and delivering safeguarding training. It also seeks to encourage inter-agency and multi-disciplinary training and education.

The challenge for the SBNI member and partner agencies will be to ensure that the strategy and framework are implemented and that training organised, procured or sought, is effective and is measured against the standards set out in this document. Creative methods can be used to deliver and engage the workforce beyond traditional 'classroom' type settings but it is important to ensure psychological safety for participants. We understand that our workforces, who may have experienced adversity or trauma, may find that their ability to learn is impacted by these experiences. This can affect how they learn, their ability to apply their learning, to learn from mistakes and may also undermine their confidence. As organisations, we are increasing our understanding of how to support

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[1] Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young people version 2.1 October 2024, DoH Co-operating-to-Safeguard-Children-and-Young-People.pdf

our workforces in order that they can do their work most effectively, whatever their role and responsibility. Therefore, organisational responsibility for staff/volunteers and their learning goes beyond simply providing a learning experience.

This strategy and framework have been developed in consultation with an advisory group representing all SBNI member agency sectors and with two separate groups of children and young people. My thanks go to the advisory group[2] and the young people[3] who provided their expertise, time, life and work experiences.

This strategy and framework will serve to guide the continuing development of our workforces in order to ensure that safeguarding children and young people is of the highest standard possible.

Bernie McNally OBE

SBNI Independent Chair

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[2]Including representatives of: PHA; Health and Social Care Trusts; Education Authority; PSNI; NSPCC; Include Youth; councils; Youth Justice Agency; community organisations.
[3] Groups facilitated by Children in Northern Ireland and Include Youth

2. Introduction

The statutory objective of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) is to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in Northern Ireland by coordinating the work and ensuring the effectiveness of each person or body represented on the Board. Under section 3(1) of the Safeguarding Board Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the SBNI must put in place arrangements for the ongoing development and review of policies and procedures relating to the training of those working with children and young people[4], or their families.

The learning and development strategy and framework outline minimum standards for child protection and safeguarding training including its planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation in both single and multi-agency training settings. It takes account of the [Department of Health Guidance to the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland 2014](#) which recommends a training framework with different levels of training commensurate with the level and nature of contact with children and young people. It should be read in conjunction with the specific learning and development frameworks and guidance developed by SBNI committees including:

- 'Mental Health Learning and Development framework': supporting the needs of children and young people in NI: [Learning and development framework: Mental Health](#)
- 'Recognising the Impact of domestic abuse on children and young people' [Learning and development framework: Domestic Abuse](#)
- 'Child Sexual Exploitation' [Learning and development framework: Child Sexual Exploitation](#)

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[4] The term 'children and young people' will be used throughout to indicate babies, children and young people, i.e. all those under 18 years of age.

3. Who is this framework for?

- all SBNI member and partner agencies ([Member Agencies](#))
- any agencies providing services to a member agency under contractual/service level agreement
- all organisations and individuals who come into contact with children and young people, and their families
- staff/volunteers who work with adults who are parents or carers
- staff/volunteers who have contact with children and young people through the course of their work
- staff/volunteers who have a learning and development role

Aim

To contribute to the improvement of child protection and safeguarding in Northern Ireland by setting out the minimum learning standards to equip staff/volunteers with the skills, knowledge and competence to promote the safety and well-being of children and young people, within the remit of their roles and responsibilities.

Objectives

1. Identify opportunities for developing and enhancing multi-disciplinary, single and multi-agency safeguarding education and training strategies across all sectors in relation to Children's Services.[5]

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[5] Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland. Version 2.1 October 2024

2. Improve the competence and confidence of staff/volunteers to safeguard the children and young people they work with or to whom they provide services.

3. Specify the minimum learning outcomes staff/volunteers should achieve in any learning and development activity, influenced by a training needs analysis which should reflect national, regional and local needs

4. Identify different levels of training aligned with the level and nature of contact with children and young people, which take account of uni and multi-agency planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

5. Inform commissioners, those developing and providing education and training programmes, plus organisations and individuals, to ensure that relevant, consistent and quality assured programmes are in place, accessible and delivered at the right level.

6. Promote a consistent, flexible and developmental approach to safeguarding learning and development to meet individual and organisational learning needs.

7. Build on child safeguarding learning which should be part of all relevant preparatory/undergraduate/pre-registration programmes.

4. Principles

It is intended that learning and development delivered under this strategy and framework will reflect the following principles:

- a rights-based approach to safeguarding children and young people in accordance with the UNCRC 1989 and the Human Rights Act 1998, specifically, a commitment to early intervention in the lives of children and young people and respect for their views (UNCRC article12)

- safeguarding and protecting children and young people is everyone's business

- all activity should be child and young person-centred

- where appropriate, a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency approach is recommended to address individual and/or organisational training needs

- learning and development opportunities must be fit for purpose, be ongoing, and have agreed learning outcomes as identified in this strategy and framework in order to support improved performance in safeguarding children and young people

- organisations have the responsibility to ensure that all learning and development:

  o is set in a legal and policy context.

  o provides relevant developmental opportunities to build staff/volunteer confidence and competence.

  o is responsive to evolving work practices and should determine the level, developmental requirements and appropriate timescale for staff/volunteers to undertake the training, using a training needs analysis.

5. Using the Learning and Development Framework

In order to guide individuals/organisations to the appropriate level of training, this framework has been designed in four levels.

Level 1 applies to all staff/volunteers within the organisation.

Level 2 applies to staff/volunteers who have direct contact with:

- children and young people
- adult carers/parents and those who have regular contact with children and young people
- adults known or suspected of posing a risk to children and young people.

Level 3 applies to staff/volunteers who:

- could contribute to assessing, planning interventions and evaluating the needs of children and young people
- could contribute to the assessment and evaluation of parental capacity, where there are safeguarding issues
- have a managerial or supervisory role
- have a learning and development role.

Level 4 applies to staff/volunteers with specialist safeguarding roles and responsibilities including those who are leaders and policy makers.

These levels may not be incremental but offer guidance on a continuum of learning and development where an individual may move between levels. For example, if an individual can evidence a higher level of skills and knowledge, they may not need to undertake learning and development at a lower level of the framework. The appropriateness of the medium of training for a varied workforce should also be considered e.g. an online individual training session may be a different learning experience from a shared group experience. Interaction may be hampered by the medium and the potential emotional impact some training can have upon staff/volunteers should be considered - follow up may be important.

6. Programme Content 2026-2030

Those in leadership positions and those assigned to develop and deliver safeguarding programmes need to be well-informed and ensure their training programmes are updated regarding:

- learning from Case Management Reviews, Serious Adverse Incidents and Domestic Homicide Reviews [Case management review](), [Serious Adverse Incidents | Department of Health]() and [Domestic Homicide Reviews | Department of Justice,]() as appropriate
- contextual safeguarding[6]
- local, regional and international research
- current and emerging best practices e.g. professional curiosity[7]
- complaints and feedback from services users/recipients of services/carers/staff/volunteers
- statistics [Northern Ireland children's social services data (provisional) | Department of Health]()

Training strategies should include interagency training and learning outcomes as identified in this framework, depending on the role and responsibility of the participants . Training may include the following as appropriate or relevant:

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[6] An approach that recognises the influence of different environments and people on children and young people's safety outside of their family. For example, in school or college, in the local community, in their peer groups or online. [Contextual safeguarding | NSPCC Learning]()
[7] [Health and social care practitioners' experiences of exercising professional curiosity in child protection practice: An integrative review - Muirden - 2022 - Health and Social Care in the Community - Wiley Online Library]()

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma, including societal issues impacting adversely upon children and young people, such as poverty and lack of opportunity, set in the context of culture, race, disability, sex and gender identity, and history
- understanding of a trauma informed approach and how it benefits all aspects of service delivery and organisational structures and processes
- 'Signs of Safety' process
- chronic neglect as a form of child abuse, and effective strategies of assessing and responding to neglect
- online safety and wellbeing for children and young people
- approaches that currently inform and guide practice regarding any form of child exploitation (e.g. criminal, sexual, radicalisation)
- safeguarding children and young people with a disability or who are neurodivergent
- awareness of mental health needs of children and young people, and parents/carers, how they may relate to safeguarding and awareness of the 'Think Family' NI model [Think Family NI | Department of Health](#)
- domestic abuse or violence, in all its forms
- substance use by adults or children and young people
- children and young people who pose a risk to others e.g. harmful sexual behaviour in person or online; child to parent violence/abuse
- bullying
- working together/understanding roles and responsibilities
- thresholds of harm, risk assessment and analysis
- information sharing and confidentiality

- physical chastisement of children and young people

- safeguarding unaccompanied children/trafficked children/ children and young people who may have a threat to their life.

NB This list is not exhaustive, nor is it necessarily in order of importance; it is provided as a guide only. Priorities and concerns may change over the lifespan of this document.

7. Organisational responsibility

The SBNI Safeguarding Learning and Development Strategy and Framework complement guidance in Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland (DoH, 2024)[8] and should be adhered to. Organisations should therefore review their own internal training strategies in accordance with it. In this regard, organisations:

- have a responsibility to ensure that staff/volunteers have the appropriate knowledge, skills and competence to effectively safeguard and protect children and young people, and to meet the requirements of this strategy and framework
- have a responsibility to provide safeguarding induction to all new members of their organisation. The level of induction will depend on the individual's experience, skills and knowledge base, and be aligned with their roles and responsibilities
- must record learning and development activity in relation to safeguarding. This information should be included as part of quality assurance, governance, compliance and audit activity and be retained to reflect the individual's learning progress
- should be responsive to technological developments in terms of learning and accessing learning.

This framework suggests timescales, however, each organisation is responsible for determining if staff/volunteers require a certain level of training within a specific timeframe, for example, from date of appointment.

This overarching framework should ensure that the relevant participants then progress to specific areas of learning as appropriate.

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[8] Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland v 2.1 October 2024

8. Monitoring and review

All SBNI member agencies, and any agencies providing services to a member agency under contractual/service level agreements, should review their own internal training strategies/plans at least every three years, and update them if required in accordance with this document. Each agency/organisation should apply its own quality assurance processes. This may include effectiveness of the training upon safeguarding practice.

The SBNI intends that this learning and development strategy and framework will be reviewed every four years to ensure it remains fit for purpose, and reflects any relevant developments in safeguarding practice, policy and legislation.

9. Conclusion

An appropriately trained and supported workforce is central to safeguarding children and young people in Northern Ireland. Organisations must invest in training their staff/volunteers to ensure all those who come into contact with children, young people and their families understand their contribution to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people, and are competent and confident to carry out their role.

10. Framework

Level 1	All staff/volunteers
Knowledge and Skills	Participants will gain a basic understanding of: • **Key legislation:** Children's Rights (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child); Children (NI) Order 1995: 5 principles and categories of abuse; signs and indicators of abuse and contributory factors • **Guidance**: Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland (2024) • **Organisational policy and procedures**: staff/volunteer code of practice and responsibilities; reporting and recording procedures; whistleblowing policy; complaints procedure. • **Principles and values in practice:** awareness of vulnerability of children especially considering race, disability, identity, poverty, care experience and recognising how multiple adversities can impact child development and may cause trauma.
Learning outcomes	By the end of the training participants can: • describe the rights of children and young people • understand the 5 key principles of the Children (NI) Order 1995 • understand the definition of types of harm • recognise possible signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect • understand their role and their organisation's responsibility in keeping children and young people safe • understand how to respond to a child or young person appropriately who shares a concern and the importance of early interventions • know how and to whom to report concerns in their organisation and to whom • understand the safeguarding role of others in the organisation and externally e.g. social services, police and NSPCC • understand how adversities and trauma may impact a child or young person's development
Development requirements	Access to safeguarding training and information at induction and at least every three years, ideally regularly and cumulatively with opportunities to build knowledge and skills over time at Level 1.

Level 2 (building on Level 1 knowledge and skills)	Staff/volunteers who have direct contact with: • children and young people • adult carers/parents who have regular contact with children and young people • adults known or suspected of posing a risk to children and young people.
Knowledge and Skills	**Legislation and Guidance:** Participants will deepen their understanding of: • The Children (NI) Order 1995- principles and application • The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). **Relevant legislation, such as:** • Criminal Law Act (NI) 1967 • Human Rights Act 1998 • Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021 • Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 • Online Safety Act 2023 • Ending Violence Women and Girls (EVAWG) strategy. **Organisational Policy and Procedures:** Participants will learn to: • recognise and respond to safeguarding concerns (e.g. peer abuse, online harms, domestic violence including child to parent) • understand internal and external safeguarding role and referral process (e.g. UNOCINI) in line with role and responsibility • consider how a wide range of adversities may impact upon child development • apply principles of confidentiality and appropriate information sharing • use child centred safeguarding models relevant to their role and discipline.

Learning outcomes	By the end of the training participants can: • apply safeguarding legislation and guidance to practice • recognise and respond to a range of safeguarding concerns and disclosures • work collaboratively and confidentially with other agencies to effectively safeguard children and young people • practice early intervention strategies and effectively interact with children and their parents/carers • respond appropriately to online harms • use a trauma lens to understand child and family needs • safeguard children who are marginalised or minoritised • use best models of child centred practice in own discipline • communicate safeguarding concerns in both verbal and written forms • advocate for the child's right to be heard • develop effective communication skills tailored to their role • build trust and adapt to diverse communication needs of children, families and carers • have confidence in seeking support (e.g. interpreters, cultural mediators.)
Development requirements	Minimum of 3 hours of facilitated training over three years, preferably in-person and cumulative, sufficient to meet the above standards. Refresher training should build on prior knowledge and skill of the practitioner and support continuous professional development.

Level 3 (building upon Level 2 knowledge and skills)	Staff/volunteers who: • contribute to assessing, planning, intervening and evaluating the needs of children, parent/carer capacity where there are safeguarding issues • hold managerial or supervisory roles • have a specific safeguarding responsibility • lead or contribute to learning and development for Levels 1 and 2
Knowledge and Skills	• key tasks regarding safeguarding of children • thresholds of harm • intersectionality and contextual safeguarding complexities; • deeper understanding of how a trauma informed approach can support recovery and build resilience from abuse and neglect in childhood • national, regional and local policies, standards and guidance including emerging developments in knowledge(research), skills and models of practice • current and emerging risks to children in context of their race, disability, age, sex, gender, identity, societal influences, online world and activities • education and justice roles in safeguarding • escalation of professional differences
Learning outcomes	By the end of the training participants can: • communicate clearly and effectively with children and young people, parents, carers and colleagues regarding safeguarding concerns (internal and external to the organisation) • communicate decision making to staff/volunteers, understanding the potential impact upon relevant parties • understand and represent one's own organisation/role/agency in multi-disciplinary settings such as safeguarding children, child protection case conferences. • use supervision and/or provide supervision ensuring that safeguarding practices are optimum and that the risk of secondary and vicarious trauma is avoided or responded to supportively, if present • develop own understanding and practises in response to feedback, practice changes, and context change.
Development requirements	Access to safeguarding training, information, learning and development at induction and at a minimum of every three years in order to develop skills over time at level 3. Different learning experiences could include:

	complex case studies; immersive training experiences (e.g. CSE training tool); face to face training; group and peer supervision; training on a multi-agency basis; opportunities to learn across regions and borders; conducting research; engaging with those who use/access services in order to develop services

Level 4 (building upon knowledge, skills and development in previous three levels)	Staff/volunteers who • have specialist safeguarding roles and responsibilities including leaders and policy makers • are in teaching/learning roles for levels 1 to 3
Knowledge and Skills	Policy, guidelines and protocol expertise and development ability. Contribute to international, national, regional and local governance, strategic and operational processes Fulfilment of the specialist role within their organisation Incorporate learning from relevant research, enquiry and review reports. Incorporate learning regarding diversity into policy and practice
Learning outcomes	By the end of the training participants can: • develop effective professional judgment and decision-making skills • recognise complexity of context regarding race, gender, culture, identity, disability, neurodiversity and history • investigate safeguarding issues • provide verbal and written report and evidence • contribute to effective interagency working • contribute to effective governance arrangements • contribute to and/or influence the development of policy and procedure • meet on-going professional development standards and any other requirements.
Development requirements	Access to learning and development activity that enables them to develop their skills in level 4. This can be in a variety of forms e.g. online training and webinars; attending conferences; participating in working groups or committees; delivering training (to peers etc.); opportunities for research into practice (formal and informal); cross sectoral working; multi-agency working; co-production; whatever means supports continuous professional development.

11. References

ARK (2025) Young Life and Times (YLT) Survey [YLT | ARK - Access Research Knowledge](#)

DoH (2024) [Co-operating-to-Safeguard-Children-and-Young-People.pdf](#) version 2.1

DoH [Northern Ireland children's social services data (provisional) | Department of Health](#)

DoH [Think Family NI | Department of Health](#)

DoJ [Publications | Department of Justice Domestic Homicide Reviews](#)

Education Authority [Addressing Bullying in Schools Act 2016 | Education Authority Northern Ireland](#)

[LearnHSCNI | An Introduction to Cultural Competence](#)

Muirden (2022) [Health and social care practitioners' experiences of exercising professional curiosity in child protection practice: An integrative review -   Muirden - 2022 - Health and Social Care in the Community - Wiley Online Library](#)

NSPCC [Contextual safeguarding | NSPCC Learning](#)

SBNI [Adversity, Trauma and Resilience training modules](#)

SBNI [Case management review](#)

SBNI [Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland Procedures Manual](#)

SBNI (2024) 'CSE Awareness and Training Framework' [Learning and development framework: Child Sexual Exploitation](#)

SBNI (2024) 'Recognising the Impact of Domestic Abuse on Children and Young People'. [Learning and development framework: Domestic Abuse](#)

SBNI (2024) 'The SBNI Mental Health Learning and Development Framework supporting the Needs of Children and Young People in Northern Ireland' [Learning and development framework: Mental Health](#)

SBNI [Online Safety Hub - Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland](#)

The Executive Office (2025) End Violence Against Women and Girls: [Strategic Framework – EVAWG](#)

The Northern Ireland Executive's Online Safety Strategy 2022-2027 Online Safety Strategy and Action Plan | Department of Health

UK Government (2023) Online Safety Act 2023. Online Safety Act 2023

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: uncrc_summary-1_1.pdf