3.5. Ability to recognise and respond to concerns about child protection

Effective delivery of child protection competences depends critically on their integration with knowledge of: child/young person and family development and transitions, consent and confidentiality, legal issues relevant to working with children/young people and families/carers, interagency working, and engaging families/carers and children/young people.

Knowledge of policies and legislation

- An ability to draw on knowledge of national and local child protection standards, legal frameworks and guidance which relate to the protection of children
- An ability to draw on knowledge of local policies and protocols regarding:
  - confidentiality and information sharing
  - recording of information about children/young people and their families/carers
- An ability to draw on knowledge of the statutory responsibilities of all adults (e.g. parents, carers, school staff) to keep children/young people safe from harm
- An ability to draw on knowledge that practitioners are responsible for acting on concerns about a child/young person even if they are not their client

Knowledge of child protection principles

- An ability to draw on knowledge of child protection principles underlying multiagency child protection work
- An ability to draw on knowledge of the benefits of early identification of at-risk children/young people and families/carers, who can then receive appropriate and timely preventative and therapeutic interventions
- An ability to draw on knowledge of the importance of maintaining a child-centred approach that ensures a consistent focus on the welfare of the child/young person and on their feelings and viewpoints
- An ability to draw on knowledge that assessment and intervention processes should be continually reviewed, and should be timed and tailored to the individual needs of the child/young person and their family/carers

Ability to draw on knowledge of how neglect and abuse can present

- An ability to draw on knowledge of the concept of significant harm, and of:
  - a threshold that justifies intervention in home life in the best interests of children/young people

- An ability to draw on knowledge that there are no absolute criteria for significant harm, but that it is based on consideration of:
  - the degree and extent of physical harm
  - the degree and extent of physical harm
  - the extent of premeditation
  - the presence or degree of threat
  - the actual or potential impact on the child/young person's health, development and/or welfare
- An ability to draw on knowledge that significant harm can be indicated by a one-off incident, a series of 'minor' incidents, or as a result of an accumulation of concerns over a period of time
- An ability to draw on knowledge of areas in which abuse and neglect are manifested, including:
  - physical abuse (e.g. causing deliberate harm, or female genital mutilation)
  - emotional abuse, including:
    - persistent emotional maltreatment that is likely to impact on the child/young person's emotional development
  - sexual abuse – the abuse of a child/young person through sexual exploitation, which includes:
    - penetrative and non-penetrative sexual contact
    - non-contact activities (e.g. watching sexual activities or encouraging a child/young person to behave in sexually inappropriate ways)
  - neglect – usually defined as an omission of care by the child/young person's parent/carer (often due to unmet needs of their own)
    - persistent failure to meet a child/young person's basic physical and/or psychological needs
- An ability to draw on knowledge of the short- and long-term effects of abuse and neglect, including their cumulative effects
- An ability to draw on knowledge that (while offering support and services to parents of abused children/young people) the needs of the child/young person are primary
- An ability to draw on knowledge that children/young people may experience multiple forms of abuse from different people or groups during their development to adult

Ability to recognise possible signs of abuse and neglect

- An ability to recognise behaviours shown by children/young people that could indicate abuse or neglect, and that may require further investigation, e.g.:
  - appearing to be frightened or intimidated by an adult or peer
  - acting in a way that is inappropriate for their age and development

- An ability to recognise possible signs of physical abuse, e.g.:
  - explanations that are inconsistent with an injury, or an unexplained delay in seeking treatment
  - parents/carers who seem uninterested or undisturbed by an accident or injury
  - repeated or multiple bruising or other injury on sites unlikely to be injured as a consequence of everyday activity/accidents

- An ability to recognise possible signs of emotional abuse, e.g.:
  - developmental delay and/or non-organic failure to thrive
  - indicators of serious attachment problems between parent and child
  - markedly aggressive or appeasing behaviour towards others
  - indicators of serious scapegoating within the family
  - indicators of low self-esteem and lack of confidence
  - marked difficulties in relating to others

- An ability to recognise possible behavioural signs of sexual abuse, e.g.:
  - inappropriate sexualised conduct (e.g. sexually explicit behaviour, play or conversation, inappropriate to the child/young person's age)
  - self-harm and suicide attempts
  - involvement in sexual exploitation or a child/young person's indiscriminate choice of sexual partners
  - anxious unwillingness to remove clothes (for example, for a. sports events) which is not related to cultural norms or physical difficulties)

- An ability to recognise possible physical signs of sexual abuse, e.g.:
  - genital discomfort
  - blood on underclothes
  - pregnancy
- An ability to recognise that allegations of sexual abuse by children/young people may initially be indirect (to test the professional's response)

- An ability to recognise that, in most cases, evidence of neglect accumulates over time and across agencies, and:
  - an ability to compile a chronology and discuss concerns with other agencies to determine whether minor incidents indicate a broader pattern of parental neglect
- An ability to recognise possible signs of neglect, e.g.:
  - failure by parents/carers to meet essential physical needs (e.g. adequate or appropriate food, clothes, hygiene and medical care)
  - failure by parents/carers to meet essential emotional needs (e.g. to feel loved and valued, to live in a safe, predictable home environment);
  - the child/young person thrives away from home environment
  - the child/young person is frequently absent from school

- An ability to recognise the potential for professionals to be desensitised to indicators of neglect when working in areas with a high prevalence of poverty and deprivation

Ability to draw on knowledge of bullying

- An ability to draw on knowledge that bullying can become a formal child protection issue when parents/carers, schools and other involved agencies fail to address the bullying in an adequate manner
- An ability to draw on knowledge that bullying is defined as deliberately hurtful behaviour, usually repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those bullied to defend themselves
- An ability to draw on knowledge that bullying can take many forms, but the four main types are:
  - physical (e.g. hitting, kicking, theft)
  - verbal (e.g. racist or homophobic remarks, threats, name-calling)
  - emotional (e.g. isolating an individual from the activities and social acceptance of their peer group)
  - cyber-bullying (use of technology by children/young people to intimidate/humiliate peers, and sometimes those working with them, such as teachers)
- An ability to draw on knowledge that bullying can affect the health and development of children/young people, and at the extreme, causes them significant harm (including triggering self-harm)

An ability to recognise parental behaviours associated with abuse or neglect

- An ability to recognise parental behaviours that are associated with abuse or neglect, and which may require further investigation, e.g.:
  - parents/carers persistently avoid routine child health services and/or treatment when the child is ill
  - parents/carers persistently avoid contact with services or delay the start or continuation of treatment
  - parents/carers persistently complain about/to the child and may fail to provide attention or praise (high criticism/low warmth environment)
  - parents/carers display a rejecting or punitive parenting style or are not appropriately responsive to their child's signals of need
  - parents/carers are regularly absent or leave the child with inappropriate carers
  - parents/carers fail to ensure the child receives an appropriate education

Ability to recognise risk factors for, and protective factors against, abuse or neglect

- An ability to draw on knowledge that abuse and neglect are more likely to occur when the accumulation of risk factors outweighs the beneficial effects of protective factors
- An ability to recognise child, parental and family/social protective factors
- An ability to recognise parental risk factors for abuse or neglect, e.g.:
  - parents/carers have significant problems which impact on their ability to parent (such as markedly poor mental health or significant substance misuse)
  - parents/carers are involved in domestic abuse or involvement in other criminal activity
- An ability to recognise family/social risk factors for abuse or neglect, e.g.:
  - social isolation
  - socioeconomic problems
  - history of abuse in the family
- An ability to recognise child risk factors for abuse or neglect, e.g.:
  - recurring illness or hospital admissions or disability
  - difficult or aggressive temperament

Ability to respond where a need for child protection has been identified

- An ability to ensure that actions taken in relation to child protection are consistent with relevant legislation and local policy and procedure

Ability to report concerns about child protection

- An ability to work collaboratively with children/young people and their families/carers to promote their participation in gathering information and making decisions
- An ability to report suspicions of risk to appropriate agencies, and:
  - to share information with relevant parties, with the aim of drawing attention to emerging concerns
  - to gather information from other relevant agencies (e.g. school, GPs)
- An ability to follow local referral procedures to social work and other relevant agencies, for investigation of concerns or signs of abuse or neglect
- An ability to record information, setting out the reasons for concern and the evidence for it
- An ability to contact and communicate with all those who are at risk, ensuring that they understand the purpose for the contact with, and referral to, other agencies
- An ability to follow local and national procedures where there is difficulty contacting children/young people and families/carers and there is a concern that they are missing from the known address
- An ability to follow guidelines on how confidentiality and disclosure will be managed

Ability to contribute to the development of a child protection plan

- An ability to contribute information to multi-agency child protection meetings including child protection case discussions, child protection case conferences and core group meetings
  - where necessary, an ability to express a concern or position that is different from the views of others, and to do so during (rather than subsequent to) the meeting
- An ability to participate in the development of a multi-agency protection plan, as per local and national guidance

Ability to implement protective interventions

- An ability to implement protective interventions within the remit of the service and which are outlined in the child protection plan, aiming to:
  - reduce or eliminate risk factors for abuse or neglect
  - build on the strengths and resilience factors of parent/carer, family and child/young person
- An ability to maintain support for children/young people and families/carers when compulsory measures are necessary
- Where relevant, an ability to maintain therapeutic support for the child/young person and families/carers during an ongoing child protection investigation, and/or when the child/young person is called to be a witness in court
- An ability to respond appropriately to contingencies that indicate a need for immediate action, and:
  - to provide a single agency response without delay
  - where additional help is required, an ability to work with others to ensure that this is timely, appropriate and proportionate

Ability to record and report on interventions that the practitioner is responsible for

- An ability to document decisions and actions taken, and the evidence for taking these decisions, what further help is required and how this will be actioned

Interagency working

- An ability to draw on knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of other services available to the child/young person and family/carers, and:
  - an ability to draw on knowledge of how other services should respond to child protection concerns
- An ability to collaborate with all potentially relevant agencies when undertaking assessment, planning, intervention and review
- An ability to ensure that there is timely communication with all agencies involved in the case, verbally and in writing

- An ability to escalate concerns within one's own service or between other agencies (e.g. when the implementation of the child protection plan is problematic, or to ensure sufficient recognition of risk factors and signs of abuse)

Ability to seek advice and supervision

- An ability for the practitioner to make use of supervision and support from other members of staff to manage their own emotional responses to providing care and protection for children/young people
- An ability to recognise the limits of one's own expertise and to seek advice from appropriately trained and experienced people