

Information sharing

28. No single practitioner can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances so effective sharing of information between practitioners, local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment, and service provision to keep children safe. Rapid reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews have highlighted that missed opportunities to record, understand the significance of, and share information in a timely manner can have severe consequences for children¹¹.
29. Practitioners should be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess, and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children. This may be when problems are first emerging (for example, persistent school absences) or where a child is already known to local authority children's social care. Sharing information about any adults with whom that child has contact, which may impact the child's safety or welfare, is also critical.
30. Information sharing is also essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour when a child is at risk of going missing or has gone missing, including being missing from education. When multiple children appear associated to the same context or locations of risk, or in relation to children in the secure estate where there may be multiple local authorities involved in a child's care, it will be for local safeguarding partners to consider how they build relationships and share relevant information in a timely and proportionate way with each other, other local organisations, and other safeguarding partnerships.
31. The Data Protection Act 2018¹² and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) supports the sharing of relevant information for the purposes of keeping children safe. Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. To ensure effective safeguarding arrangements:
 - all organisations and agencies should have arrangements in place that set out clearly the processes and the principles for sharing information. The arrangements should cover how information will be shared with their own organisation/agency and with others who may be involved in a child's life
 - practitioners should not assume that someone else will pass on information that they think may be critical to keep a child safe. If a practitioner has concerns about a child's welfare or safety, then they should share the information with local authority children's social care and/or the police. All practitioners should be particularly alert to the importance of sharing information when a child moves from one local authority into another, due to the risk that knowledge pertinent to keeping a child safe could be lost
 - UK GDPR provides a number of bases for sharing personal information. It is not necessary to seek consent to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of a child provided that there

¹¹ [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel 2021: annual report](#)

¹² [Data Protection Act 2018](#)

is a lawful basis to process any personal information required. The legal bases that may be appropriate for sharing data in these circumstances could be “legal obligation” or “public task”, which includes the performance of a task in the public interest or the exercise of official authority. Each of the lawful bases under UK GDPR has different requirements¹³. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to obtain consent to share data, but it is important to note that UK GDPR sets a high standard for consent which is specific, time limited and can be withdrawn (in which case the information would have to be deleted)

32. Practitioners must have due regard to the relevant data protection principles which allow them to share personal information, as provided for in the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR. To share information effectively:
- practitioners should be confident of the lawful bases and processing conditions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR that allow them to store and share information, including information which is considered sensitive, such as health data, known under the data protection legislation as “special category personal data”
 - where practitioners need to share special category personal data, for example, where information obtained is sensitive and needs more protection, they should consider and identify the lawful basis for doing so under Article 6 of UK GDPR, and in addition be able to meet one of the specific conditions for processing under Article 9. The Data Protection Act 2018 specifies “safeguarding of children and individuals at risk” as a processing condition that allows practitioners to share information, including without consent (where in the circumstances consent cannot be given, it cannot be reasonably expected that a practitioner obtains consent or if to gain consent would place a child at risk). However, practitioners should be aware of the risks of processing special category data and be mindful that a data protection impact assessment must be completed for any type of processing which is likely to be high risk¹⁴
33. Practitioners should aim to be as transparent as possible by telling families what information they are sharing and with whom, provided that it is safe to do so.

¹³ [Lawful basis for processing: Information Commissioner's Office](#)

¹⁴ [Data protection impact assessments | ICO](#)

Common myths that hinder effective information sharing

Data protection legislation is a barrier to sharing information

No. The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR do not prohibit the collection and sharing of personal information, but rather provide a framework to ensure that personal information is shared appropriately. In particular, the Data Protection Act 2018 balances the rights of the information subject (the individual whom the information is about) and the possible need to share information about them.

Consent is needed to share personal information

No, you do not need consent to share personal information. It is one way to comply with the data protection legislation but not the only way. UK GDPR provides a number of bases for sharing personal information. It is not necessary to seek consent to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of a child provided that there is a lawful basis to process any personal information required. The legal bases that may be appropriate for sharing data in these circumstances could be 'legal obligation', or 'public task' which includes the performance of a task in the public interest or the exercise of official authority. Each of the lawful bases under UK GDPR has different requirements. It is good practice to be transparent and inform parents/carers that you are sharing information for these purposes and seek to work cooperatively with them, where it is safe to do so.

Personal information collected by one organisation/agency cannot be disclosed to another

No, this is not the case unless the information is to be used for a purpose incompatible with the purpose for which it was originally collected. In the case of children in need, or children at risk of significant harm, it is difficult to foresee circumstances where information law would be a barrier to sharing personal information with other practitioners¹⁵.

The common law duty of confidence and the Human Rights Act 1998 prevent the sharing of personal information

No, this is not the case. In addition to the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR, practitioners need to balance the common law duty of confidence and the Human Rights Act 1998 against the effect on individuals or others of not sharing the information

IT systems are often a barrier to effective information sharing

There are many IT systems that support the sharing of information, such as the Child Protection Information Sharing project (CP-IS). It is important that the sector continues to work with IT suppliers to ensure that their user needs around information sharing are factored into priorities for system enhancement.

¹⁵ Practitioners looking to share information should consider which processing condition in the Data Protection Act 2018 is most appropriate for use in the particular circumstances of the case. This may be the safeguarding processing condition or another relevant provision.