

Guidance to Embed the Think Family Approach Across Services for Children and Adults in Responding to Safeguarding Concerns

Think Child – Think Adult – Think Family



Purpose of this Guidance

To embed the Think Family approach into everyday practice, ensuring that adults and children are never safeguarded in isolation and that risk, protections and support are understood and coordinated across the whole system.

Audience

All practitioners, managers, and strategic leaders across Salford including statutory, commissioned, and VCSE organisations who work with or have contact with children, adults, and families.

Remember

Children's practitioners have a responsibility to safeguard adults at risk.

Adult practitioners have a responsibility to safeguard children.

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What is Think Family?

The 'Think Family' approach is about seeing the bigger picture in safeguarding. Whether you work with adults, children, or families because risks and strengths rarely exist in isolation. People live in networks, families, households, and relationships, where one person's circumstances can affect others.

A 'Think Family' approach considers the needs **of all family members** and not just the individual person that a professional is supporting or working with.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and **whether you primarily work with children, young people or adults**, it is essential to consider the well-being and safety of everyone within their family context.

This means that safeguarding isn't just about the individual in front of you. It's about using an intersectional lens to help understand how their situation and identity connects to those around them and working together to provide holistic, joined-up support.

Useful Links Relating to 'Think Family'

[Think Family | Partners in Salford](#)

Why Should We Think Family?

Learning from local and national reviews show that when services focus only on single issues or one-person, overlapping vulnerabilities and risks can be missed. Local reviews highlighting the need for a Think Family approach include, but are not limited to Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) '[Matthew](#)', [Joint Adults' and Children Review 2023](#), Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) '[Yvonne](#)'

Adopting a Think Family mindset helps practitioners to:

Spot risks early by considering the whole family network

Share information effectively across adults' and children's services

Reduce duplication and gaps in support

Build on strengths to empower families and improve outcomes

Learning from reviews, including [Eileen Munro's examination of the child protection system](#), reinforces that a wider family focus strengthens outcomes. Meeting the needs of family members who may pose risks benefits the child, the adult, and the family as a whole.

How Should We Think Family?

Each step should be applied whether the **initial contact is with an adult or a child**, and should consider safeguarding duties across the whole system.

1. Recognise the wider family context

Start by recognising that individuals rarely live in isolation, so always consider the wider family context when working with a child, parent, or adult. Take a **child-centred, person-centred, whole-family approach** by recognising how the family and home environment shapes each person's safety and wellbeing. This includes exploring who lives in the home, family routines, relationships, and the wider ecological context.

2. Identify the Person's Own Family Network

Identify who the person considers to be part of their family or key support network, recognising that "family" does not always mean blood relatives. Family means different things to different people, so explore who is important in their life and the roles, relationships and influence of significant others in the child's, adult's and family's life. Remember the importance of building positive, trusting relationships with family members.

3. Explore support provided by family members

Explore the support and/or unpaid care provided by family members, recognising both strengths and potential pressures. Assess whether these caring arrangements are appropriate, proportionate, and sustainable over time.

Make the impact of caring roles explicit, including:

adults who provide unpaid care

parent carers of disabled children

young carers

If an individual looks after a friend or relative who could not manage without their support, they are considered to be a 'carer'. To find out more about what support is available for carers and making a carer's referral if appropriate [please follow this link](#).

4. Identify linked or overlapping difficulties

Use professional curiosity and consider whether people in the family are experiencing related or overlapping needs and challenges that may increase risk to children or other adults within the household or network, such as:

- Abuse or neglect including self-neglect
- Learning or physical disabilities (SEND – Developmental considerations)

- Disability or Complex health needs and health conditions (including co-occurring conditions)
- Neurodivergence
- Domestic abuse and violence
- Mental health needs and conditions
- Poverty, social isolation or insecure housing
- Substance or alcohol misuse/addiction

These situations rarely sit in isolation and often require a **joined up, multi agency response**

5. Take a whole family approach

Recognise that each person's needs, behaviours and outcomes affect others within the family system. Effective safeguarding relies on **understanding how adult needs and circumstances impact the child's lived experience**, rather than considering adults and children in isolation.

Assessment and planning should clearly explain and record **how adult needs and system responses increase or reduce risk for the child**, focusing on whether change is meaningful and sustained. This ensures decision-making remains evidence-based and responsive to cumulative risk over time.

6. Work collaboratively across agencies

When we 'think family', we work jointly with other agencies to share responsibility - working collaboratively is not just about good information sharing, although sharing information is vital.

Identify which agencies are involved with each family member and make contact with them to let them know you are now involved and are ready to work collaboratively with them. Share information proportionately and appropriately including sharing any relevant multi-agency risk assessments. You may need to complete referrals/raise concerns for other family members where this is appropriate. **If you have a safeguarding concern about any family member, you have the responsibility to raise that concern - do not assume someone else will do it.**

Ensure that services for children, young people, adults, and families coordinate their work, jointly, plan interventions where appropriate, share relevant information and avoid siloed practice. [[See information on Information-sharing below](#)]

Good collaborative multi-agency working looks like:

- Practitioners clearly identify all agencies involved with each family member
- Concerns are raised promptly where required through the appropriate channels
- Information is shared appropriately, in line with statutory expectations

- Agencies work collaboratively and jointly—going beyond information sharing to include shared risk assessments and collective responsibility for planning and decision-making
- Practitioners take responsibility and do not assume another agency will address a safeguarding concern
- Barriers to engagement are recorded, along with how they have influenced decisions about information sharing and risk management
- Concerns about professional disagreements between partner agencies should be escalated if required (see [the SSAB Multi-Agency Escalation Policy/SSCP Professional Challenge and Escalation procedure 2026.](#))

7. Aim for long-term, sustainable change

Engage in **outcome-focused, ongoing support**, not an isolated concern or short-term intervention. Sustainable change is achieved through:

- Consistent multi-agency collaboration
- Monitoring progress
- Supporting resilience and capability within the family
- Strengthening natural support networks

This whole-family view enables families to improve their collective situation and maintain change.

Children's Practitioners Remember:

Be alert to the needs of adults at risk within the household or extended family.

Consider the needs and welfare of any children you encounter during your work.

Take appropriate action where concerns arise, including making safeguarding referrals.

Useful Links relating to Safeguarding Adults:

- [Worried About An Adult | Salford Safeguarding Adults Board](#)
- [Salford Adults Portal](#) to report a concern or you can contact Salford Adult Social Care Team on 0161 2026 0604.
- [How to make an Adult Safeguarding Referral online | Salford Safeguarding Adults Board](#)
- [7 Minute Briefings and Factsheets](#) (Including pertinent briefings on 'Adult Safeguarding and Raising a Concern' and 'The Duty to Safeguard Adults')
- [Salford Safeguarding Adults Board Multi-Agency Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Care Act 2014](#)
- [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK](#) (this references the need for a 'whole family approach' to assessment, support and safeguarding)
- [The Care Act and whole family approaches | Local Government Association](#)

- [Training and Learning | Salford Safeguarding Adults Board](#)
- [Safeguarding children and adults resources | Partners in Salford](#)
- [Emotional Health Service Directory | Partners in Salford](#)
- [Escalation Policy and Procedure | Salford Safeguarding Adults Board](#)
- [Domestic abuse: useful contacts•Salford City Council](#)

Adults' Practitioners Remember:

Consider the needs and welfare of children or other adults connected to the adult you are supporting.

Remember that safeguarding responsibilities extend beyond the individual you are allocated to work with.

Useful Links relating to Safeguarding Children:

- [The Bridge Referral Process | Salford Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) The Bridge Partnership: 0161 603 4500 (8.30am–4.30pm)
- [Online referral portal](#)
- [LADO](#) (allegations about adults working with children): 0161 603 4350 / 4445
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2026\)](#)
- [SSCP Support and Safeguarding in Salford: Helping Children to Thrive](#)
- [Greater Manchester Safeguarding Children Procedures Manual](#)
- [Emotional Health Service Directory | Partners in Salford](#)
- [SSCP Training Programme | Salford Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)
- [Safeguarding children and adults resources | Partners in Salford](#)
- [SSCP Policies and Procedures and pathway guidance](#)

Information Sharing within Think Family

- Consider the wider family context when assessing risk and deciding what information to share.
- Share information with consent wherever possible.
- Share without consent when necessary to prevent harm, protect someone from abuse or neglect, or safeguard life.
- Document decisions and rationale clearly.
- Do not delay action while seeking consent if someone is at risk.
- Understand that the law supports information sharing for safeguarding purposes.

Useful Links relating to Information Sharing:

- [SSAB 7 Minute Briefing on information sharing](#)
- [Information Sharing and Confidentiality | Salford Safeguarding Adults Board](#)
- [Information Sharing and Confidentiality | Salford Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

- [DfE non statutory information sharing advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services for children, young people, parents and carers](#)
- [SSAB Short Video on 'When Should I Share Information'](#)

Local Reporting Pathways

Local Request for Support and Referral

- [Right Care, Right Person](#)

Worried about an adult

- Adult Social Care Contact Team: 0161 206 0604 (8.30am–4.30pm)
- [Online referral portal](#)
- PiPoT concerns managed under Adult Social Care’s PiPoT process
- Out of Hours: 0161 794 8888 (4.30pm–8.30am)

Worried about a child

- The Bridge Partnership: 0161 603 4500 (8.30am–4.30pm)
- [Online referral portal](#)
- [LADO](#) (allegations about adults working with children): 0161 603 4350 / 4445
- Out of Hours: 0161 794 8888 (4.30pm–8.30am)

Emergency

- If an adult or child is in immediate danger or there is a risk to life, call police on **999**.

Review details

Version	Date Reviewed	Reviewer Name(s)	Next Review Due
V2	30/06/2026	Hilary Byles (SSAB) and Shahanara Begum (SSCP)	01/04/2029