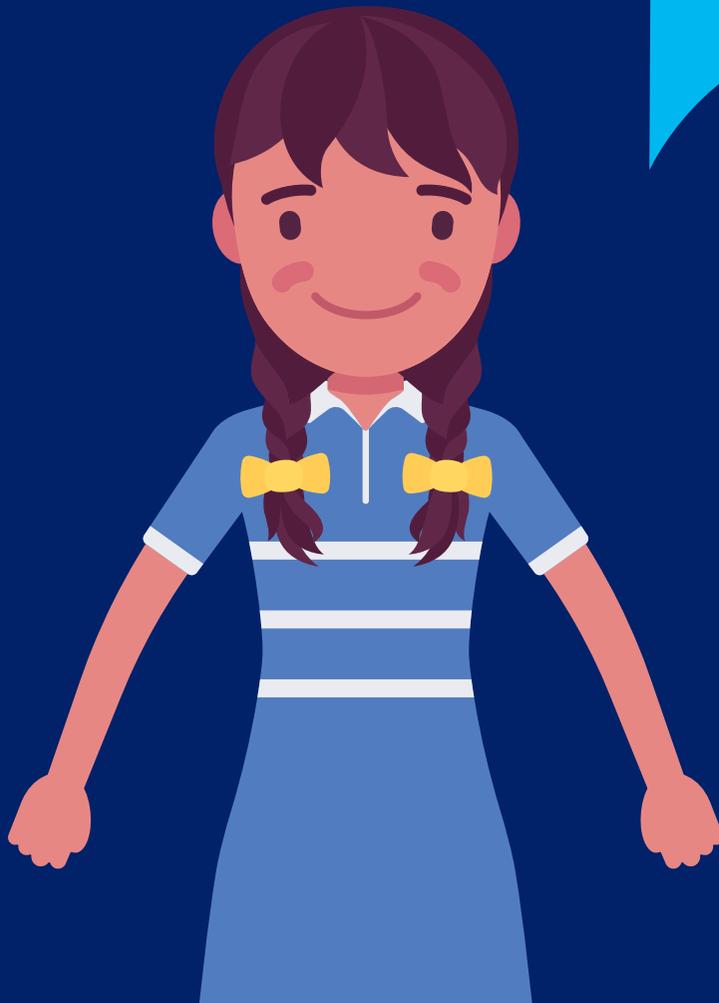




Safeguarders
Panel Team

"Come in as a
human, not as a
professional"



Children and Young People's Views on the Role of the Safeguarder

February 2022

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Introduction

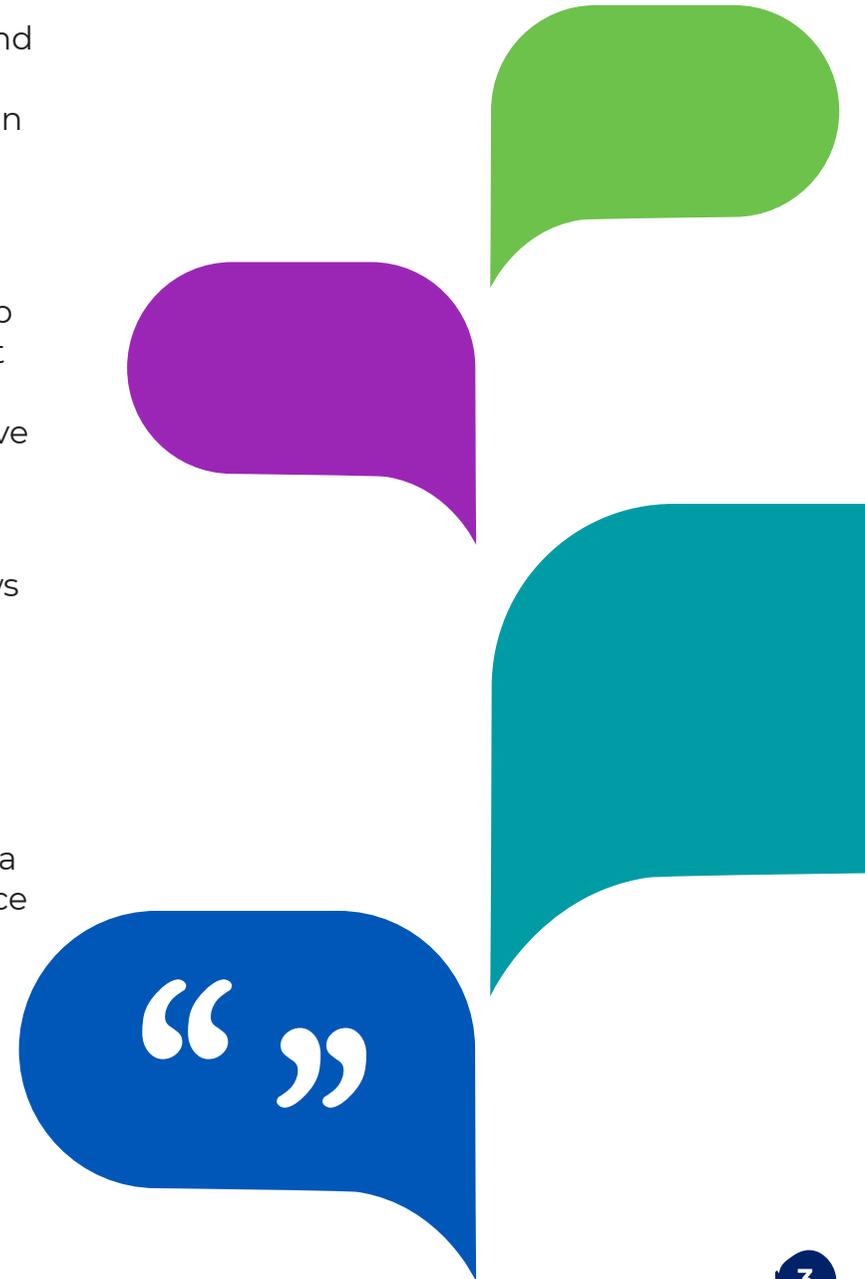
Across Scotland, children and young people's lives are shaped, changed, and influenced by decisions made within the Children's Hearings System daily. As we learned in *The Promise*, there are countless examples of how children and young people are let down by the system, seen as a case number instead of an individual, and aren't heard by the adults around them.

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), children have a range of participation rights that outline how they can help shape their world, including having their voices heard about decisions that impact on their lives. Listening to the views and experiences of care experienced children and young people is just one way that we can improve things for them as they navigate the care system.

Given the significant role that Safeguarders play in Children's Hearings for children and young people, it is essential that we are listening to their views and experiences as much as possible. By listening and considering what they have to say, children and young people's voices can influence the recruitment, training, and practice of Safeguarders.

This report describes the views and experiences of children and young people who have been involved in the Children's Hearings System and the youth justice system. The children and young people involved took part in a series of discussions about the role of the Safeguarder, highlighting practice that would make them feel safe, more respected, and more supported when they engage with a Safeguarder.

We hope you will take their insights and use them to reflect on your practice as a Safeguarder.

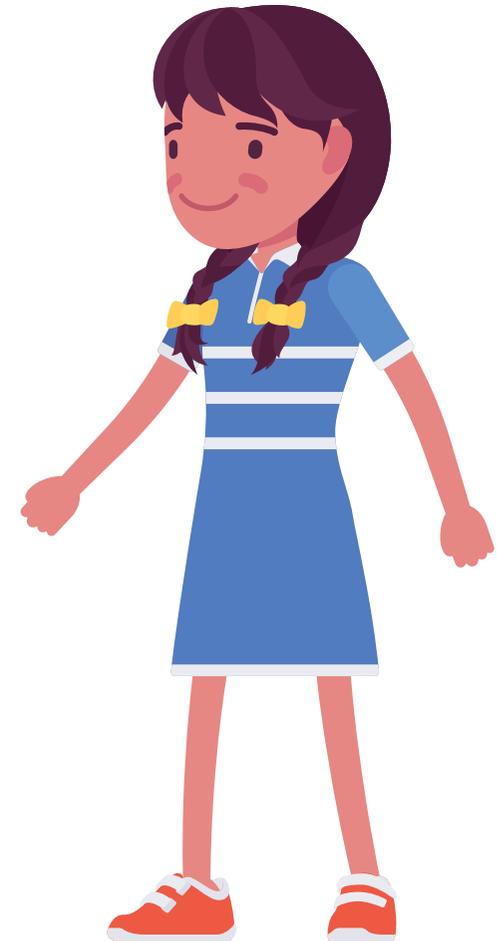


Gathering the experiences of children and young people

The Safeguarders Panel Team does not hold any records of children and young people who have been allocated a Safeguarder; this sits with the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA). As a result, we could not contact children and young people directly to ask about their experiences with their Safeguarder. Instead, we connected with partners who work directly with children and young people within the care and youth justice systems.

Across the four sessions delivered, we engaged with seven children and young people, ranging in age from 9 to 30 years old. All these children and young people have care experience, experience of youth justice, or both. Over half have worked with a Safeguarder or Curator ad litem. They represent six different areas of Scotland, including: Edinburgh, East Ayrshire, West Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Falkirk, and the Western Isles.

Thank you to Our Hearings, Our Voice, Youth Just Us, and SCRA for partnering with us to deliver this work.



All the quotes in this report come directly from the participating children and young people.

Section 1:

Who should Safeguarders be?

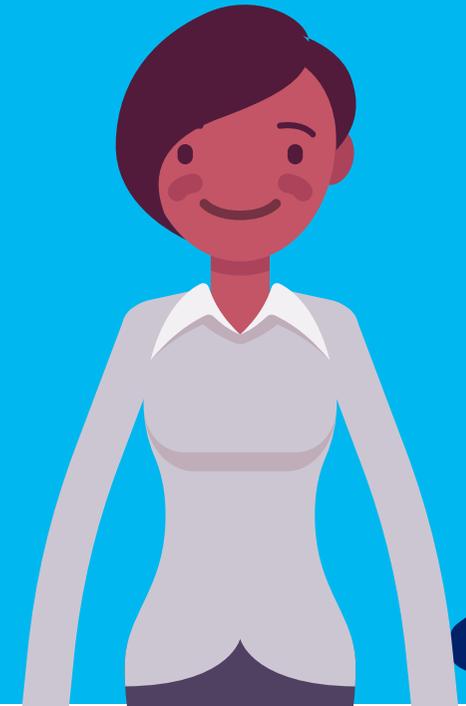
Children and young people who are involved in the care and youth justice systems have many professionals come in and out of their lives. These relationships are often defined by timelines established by the Children's Hearings System or the Court, can be short-term in nature, and are frequently inconsistent, leaving children and young people feeling confused by changes and abrupt endings.

However, it is possible for children and young people to find positives within their relationships with professionals, despite this difficult terrain. They are clear about the type of person they want to engage with and what makes them feel supported and safe.

“A Safeguarder should be hopeful that the panel or sheriff will make the right decision for the child.”

When talking about Safeguarders, they described the type of person they wanted in this role as:

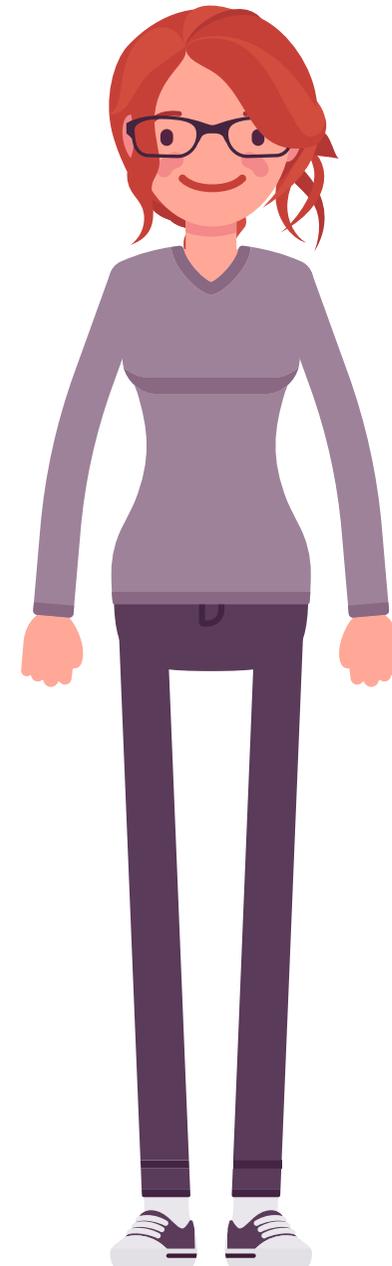
- **Respectful**
- **Kind**
- **Accepting**
- **Hopeful**
- **Trustworthy**
- **Friendly**
- **Caring**
- **A good listener**



While skills and knowledge are important in this role, these professional qualifications are secondary to the core values of the person to children and young people. They want warmth and genuineness, and someone who can see them for all that they are without judgement.

When performing this role, children and young people ask that Safeguarders:

- **Always make sure the child is safe and okay**
- **Not be cheeky or rude**
- **Have a smile on their face**
- **Be presentable but not formal**
- **Make eye contact with the child**
- **Explain everything clearly**
- **Speak in a kind voice**
- **Talk to the child one-to-one**
- **Move calmly – and don't fidget**
- **Adapt quickly to new information or situations**
- **See all sides of the story**
- **Do what they say they are going to do**
- **Make sure everyone is on the same page**



Children and young people are clear that Safeguarders should be friendly, care about them, and see them as unique individuals. However, the way that some professionals approach them can make them feel small, unheard, and unimportant. They feel that adults sometimes reinforce power dynamics by the way they dress and speak and by their body language.

“It’s everything, including the way they’re dressed, like there’s no need to come in in a suit to one of those meetings, just come in as smart casual.”

“Come in as a human, not as a professional.”

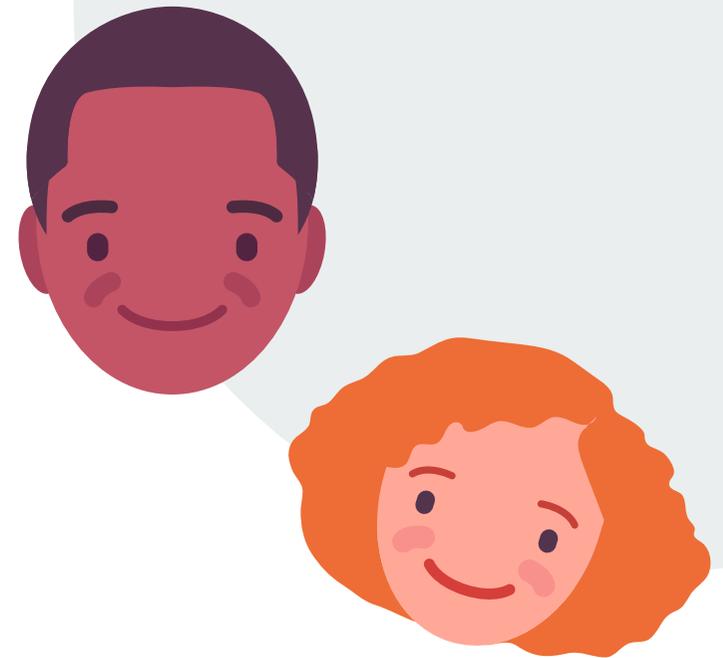
“It makes you feel like you can trust them if they’re friendly. You can kind of automatically tell if someone is kind and if you can trust them.”

“The Safeguarder that I met seemed moody and like she didn’t want to be there [in court] that day.”



While qualifications and skills were less important to children and young people for the role, they did highlight the fact that it could be beneficial for some Safeguarders to be younger and to have had care experience themselves. They want people in the role who can relate to their life experiences. This would help Safeguarders to understand the children and young people's lives and give them insight into the system from both the personal and professional sides.

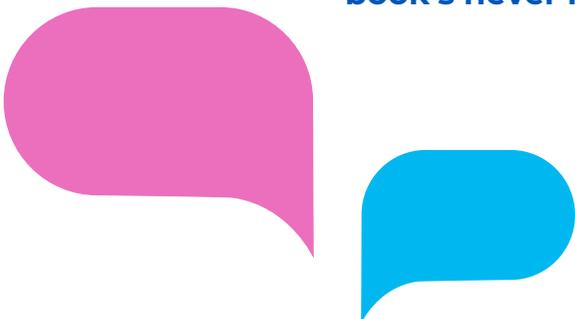
Therefore, it is important to promote diversity of background and experience within the Safeguarders Panel so that Safeguarders can better reflect and connect with the populations of children and young people they are supporting. Children and young people want professionals who are going to see their potential and do what is right for them.



“In all honesty, somebody [in their 20s], somebody who’s younger because my experience of Safeguarders have been people who are probably in their 50s or 60s and they’re quite professional in the way they deal with you.”

“Somebody who’s really just approachable. Approachable not just in the professional sense, but approachable as somebody who you can relate to, who has experience of care or has experience with a Safeguarder. Somebody who just gets it, gets the fact that at times life is going to be difficult.”

“Let’s be honest, somebody who doesn’t always play by the book because the book’s never right, and I’ve seen it. Somebody who isn’t one size fits all.”



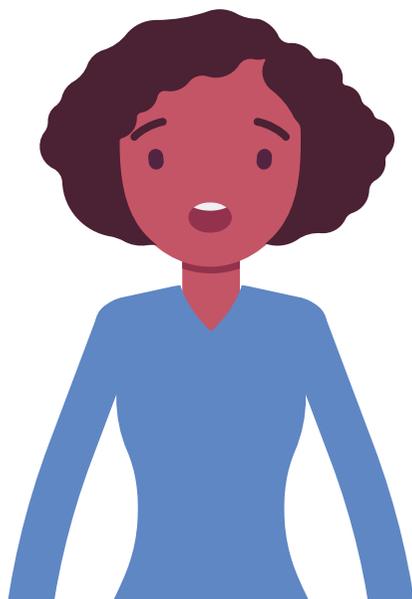
Section 2:

What might children and young people be worried or wondering about Safeguarders?

When a child or young person is allocated a Safeguarder, they are often unfamiliar with what the purpose of a Safeguarder is, and it becomes an important task for the Safeguarder to explain their role.

Additionally, for many children or young people, not knowing what the role of a Safeguarder is might result in a variety of emotions: anxiety over what is going to happen, anger at yet another professional getting involved in their lives, or confusion about the process.

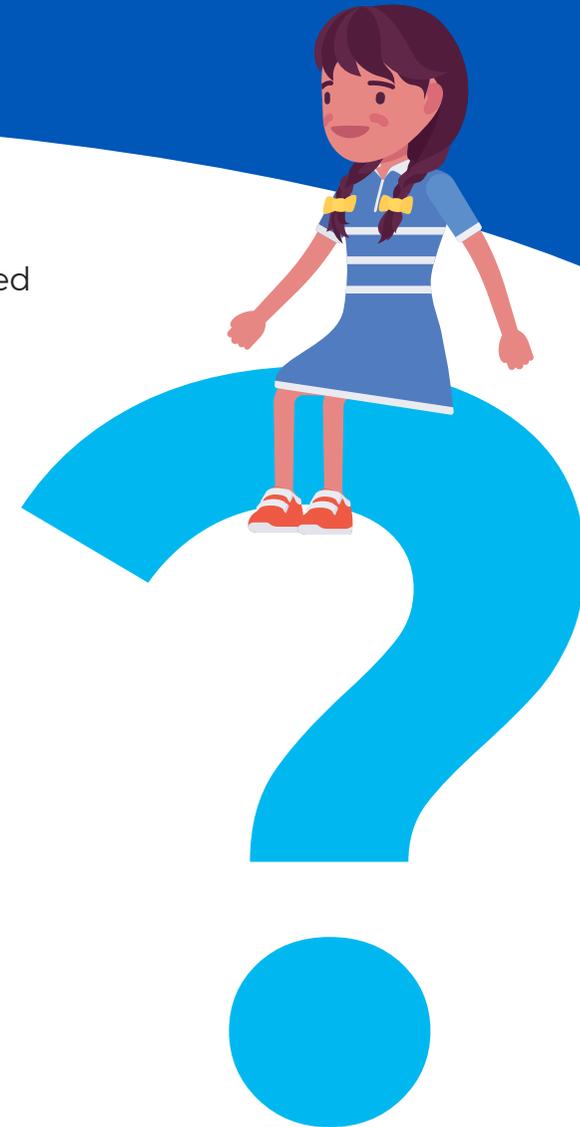
After learning they have been allocated a Safeguarder, children and young people may have a lot of questions. It is essential that Safeguarders take the time to answer all the child or young person's questions, and do so in a way that is clear, accessible and age appropriate.



“Older young people might ask more complicated questions and need more detailed answers.”

In discussing the role of the Safeguarder, children and young people identified the following questions as some of the things they may want to know:

- **What do Safeguarders do?**
- **Why is a Safeguarder involved with me?**
- **What are you doing here?**
- **Why are we talking about this?**
- **Do I have to talk to you? I don't feel comfortable talking about this.**
- **Why are you asking me so many questions?**
- **What is going to happen?**
- **Who is my Safeguarder?**
- **Who will my Safeguarder be speaking to?**



Along with having a lot of questions, being allocated a Safeguarder may also bring up a lot of worries for children and young people. They may have had many professionals come in and out of their lives, and a Safeguarder will be yet another person to whom they must tell their story. There is a lot of pressure and anxiety that accompanies sharing the difficult, sad, or traumatic things that children and young people have experienced in their lives.

Children and young people may worry about:

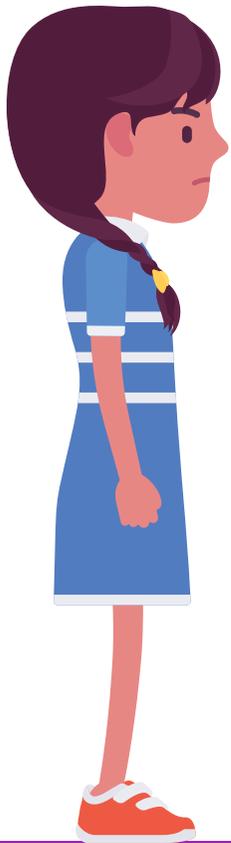
“About the decision that will be made – like maybe they will decide something the child doesn’t want.”

“If I’m missing school for an appointment.”

“You might not trust a Safeguarder because it hasn’t been explained properly so It’s just another person to talk to.”

“I think they may feel a bit upset because they don’t want to tell their whole life story to a stranger. That would be hard.”

“They may also be worried about what they are going to do with the report after it goes to the Sheriff, like what the decision might be.”



Children and young people have ideas about how best to communicate and engage with them, particularly around sensitive issues. They recognise that not all children and young people will require the same approach, and that Safeguarders will need to adjust the methods they use to communicate.



“All children, doesn't matter of your age or anything like that, are still able to share their views, if Safeguarders do it in a way that suits their needs, not [the Safeguarders'] needs. Safeguarders need to be retrained completely on how to engage children and how to engage young adults. I think there's a lack of understanding on what a Safeguarder should be doing.”

“Being able to adapt their approach to who they're actually working with. They're using their instincts as well as following what should be done, because sometimes that might need to change. There might be things that, you know, this is the way it's done, but the approach needs to change. Somebody who is able to advocate for that, who is able to stand up and say, 'maybe this isn't how it should be done, and we need to do things differently.’”

“Maybe the child should have something to play with or fidget with when they talk to a Safeguarder because it's good to fidget sometimes when you have to talk about this kind of thing.”



Finally, children and young people want to be kept informed about what is happening. There can be times where there are long gaps between meetings and Hearings, and they sometimes feel like they aren't informed of what will be next or where things are in the process. They want Safeguarders to keep them updated and to make sure they understand the steps and the timescales.

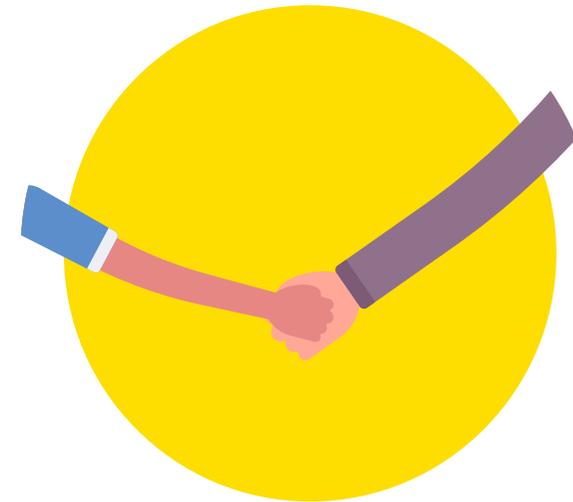
“Please regularly check in with the child to let them know what is going on!”



Section 3:

How can we ensure positive relationships between children, young people and Safeguarders?

Children and young people are concerned about the short-term nature of the Safeguarder's involvement in their lives. They wonder how a Safeguarder could know them well enough in that time to make recommendations that could have a huge impact on their lives. They feel that it is important for Safeguarders to meet with children and young people as much as possible so that they can build a relationship and develop some trust.



“Maybe they should meet a couple times before they talk about tough things.”

“They should meet with them two or more times because once isn't enough to understand the full scope of a child's life.”

“How are you meant to build a bond with that person if you only meet once. That's not helpful.”

“They should always try [to meet the child] a few times and then eventually the person will end up meeting you and end up building a bit of trust. If you give up after one time, then the person is going to be like, well they didn't really want to work with me if they gave up after only one time.”

“The Safeguarder should be using that time for the child, so they should be trying to do five days of reading and then 30 days of trying to build a relationship with the child to be able to get all the information as possible.”

In explaining the role of the Safeguarder, children and young people think that it is important for this to be the focus of the conversation early on, possibly in the first one-to-one meeting. It shouldn't be rushed or considered less important. Children and young people want to fully understand the role of the Safeguarder and the process they are involved in.

Children and young people thought that there should be multiple meetings between the child and Safeguarder to support their engagement. The first to explain the role of the Safeguarder, then meetings to discuss the child's views about their life, and then a final session to say goodbye.

“They should visit them before the main thing [i.e., talking about the issue at hand/the child's life story] and then maybe afterwards, too.”



Along with hearing directly from Safeguarders about their role and the process of their involvement, children and young people thought these would be additional sources of information:



A leaflet

“Something that is given to you where you could go to get information.”



From a social worker or other trusted adult

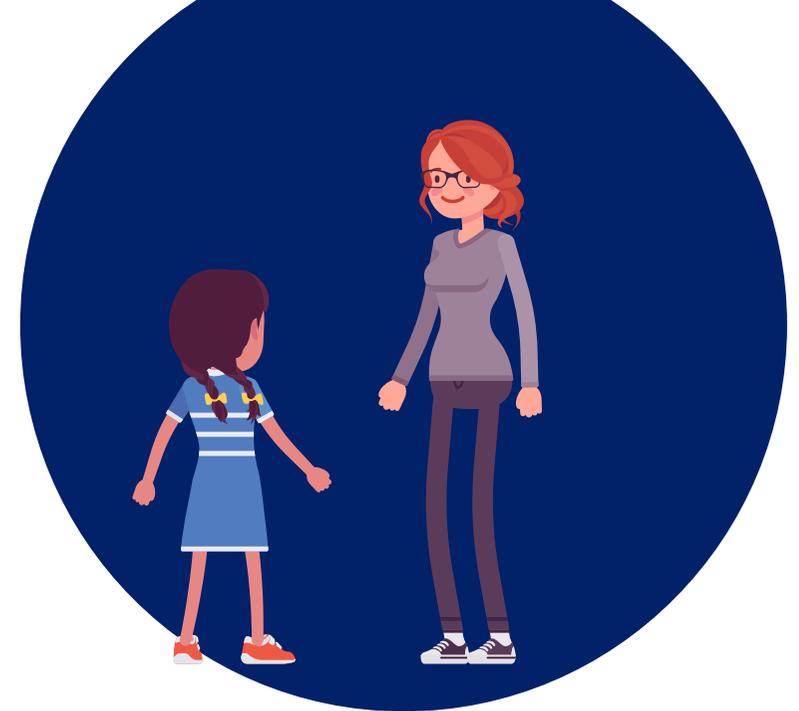
“You know them, and most young people have a good relationship with their social worker, and they can tell you about [Safeguarders], so it's important that they know what a Safeguarder is.”



Other children

“It would be good to hear it from other children, too, because sometimes it's easier to understand it, if it comes from another child.”

Children and young people emphasise how important it is to develop a connection with their Safeguarder, even within the short 35 days of their involvement. They are clear that the Safeguarder needs to do everything they can to demonstrate all the values and characteristics outlined in section 1. A particular emphasis was placed on being friendly and building trust. If children and young people are being asked to share their experiences with this person, then they want someone who is open, supportive, friendly, and trustworthy.



“Sometime young people don’t want to meet with a Safeguarder. It depends on what setting they’re in and what’s going on, because at time they might not be trusting people a lot, so they might not want to work with a Safeguarder if they’re not trusting people.”

“If someone is friendly, then I won’t stop talking!”

“I feel like if they’re not very nice or they are being rude, then the child won’t want to share their ideas with them.”

“It makes you feel like you can trust them if they’re friendly. You can kind of automatically tell if someone is kind and if you can trust them.”

“They should be friendly because otherwise you just sit there miserable and if you’re trying to tell the Safeguarder something and they’re not interested, then why bother?”

Children and young people are clear that they want meetings with Safeguarders and other professionals and Hearings to fit into their schedules and take place in locations that work for them. Often, children and young people's school and extracurricular commitments are ignored in favour of scheduling meetings that fit in adults' busy schedules. This causes them to miss out on academic, athletic, and social opportunities that their peers don't. Depending on the child, they will have locations that will be more comfortable than others to meet with their Safeguarder – this may be their school, a coffee shop, their home, etc., but this will always be specific to the child.

Children and young people want Safeguarders to make sure they are taking the child's schedule and preferences into consideration when they are scheduling a time and place for the meeting.

“Making sure the Safeguarder is giving a child the choice of where they want to meet the Safeguarder or what time is appropriate for them, rather than thinking that they need to fit in to how the Safeguarder wants to work. They have to adapt to the child.”



Engagement with a Safeguarder should have a clear beginning, middle and an end. When children and young people have worked with multiple different professionals throughout their lives, there may be instances of some professionals vanishing without any explanation, which can leave behind a sense of confusion, guilt, and hurt.

Children and young people emphasise how important goodbyes are to them, especially when professionals are only around for a short period of time. They want Safeguarders to do a good job ending their relationships with the child or young person they are working with. When a Safeguarder is clear about the boundaries and timescales of their involvement from the start, then it should minimise the potential for those feelings of confusion, guilt, and hurt.



“It makes you feel upset if they just disappear without a word. But if they say goodbye, then you understand and feel okay.”

“[If they don’t say goodbye] it may feel like it’s your fault. Because you’ve told them lots of personal stuff and then they just disappear. Even a short phone call would be better than nothing.”

“It’s a big thing that this person has come into a child’s life, and they trusted them, so if they don’t say goodbye then the child might feel let down.”

“They should say goodbye because they’ve been working with the child for a while and it’s good for the child to know if they’ll see them again or not. If the Safeguarder doesn’t say goodbye, then the child might ask their adult if they’re going to talk to them again.”

Finally, if you are a Safeguarder, children and young people have one final message:

“Be the best Safeguarder you can and smile so children feel safer and like they can trust you.”



Section 4: Reflection

Based on what the children and young people have said in this report, we'd like you to take some time to reflect on their views and experiences and consider how they can influence your practice as a Safeguarder.

1. Take a moment to reflect on how you engage with children and young people. Are you the person they described in section 1? How do you demonstrate these values? What are your strengths when engaging with children and young people? What areas could you develop further?

2. Think about how you communicate information about the role of the Safeguarder to children and young people. How would you answer the questions identified in section 2 if the young person was 14 years old? How would this change if you were speaking to a seven-year-old? How do you know your message is being received and understood?

3. How might you help ease some of the worries, like those identified in section 2, that a child or young person might have about being allocated a Safeguarder?

4. Think back to a specific child or young person you have worked with. What could you have done differently or done more of so that the child or young person fully understood your role as a Safeguarder within the Children's Hearings process?

5. Beyond the words you say, how can you show children and young people that you are trustworthy?

6. Thinking back to a specific child or young person, reflect on the ending of your engagement with them. Did you discuss endings from the first meeting? Did you explain to the child that the role would be time-limited? Was it a positive ending? Are there things that could have been done differently? What would have made it easier for that child?



www.children1st.org.uk/safeguards

To speak with someone about this report please
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Safeguards are appointed by Scottish Government Ministers and are supported by the Safeguards Panel Team. The Safeguards Panel Team (SPT) is based at Children 1st and manages the national network of Safeguards.

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