

 Features

Safeguarding in 2024: Part 4, Effective leadership

30 April [Rachel Buckler](#)

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In this final part, Rachel Buckler asks how leadership can deliver safeguarding and child protection responsibilities



Leadership responsibilities that support safeguarding and child protection in the early years go beyond those that are expected and detailed through the role of the designated safeguarding lead (DSL).

Effective leadership requires a distinct set of skills, an understanding of how to use and apply successful approaches and the ability to develop strategies that provide strong leadership to the wider workforce.

Workforce leadership transpires both internally, for example, within our own teams and for those for which we have direct responsibility, and externally with other professionals we work alongside.

When developing services for children in the context of Sure Start Children's Centres, I learned successful leadership extended beyond that of influencing and impacting my teams and service. I learned that it involved taking the lead to engage with and co-deliver alongside other professionals and disciplines.

Strategies for leading safe practice

Ensuring authenticity

Effective leaders will seek authentic sources of information and support drawing and building upon evidence-based guidance and practices that are informed by up-to-date research.

As a sound basis for safe practice, leaders will choose to follow advice from credible sources and experts on themes relevant to children's health, wellbeing and protection.

They will be able to apply due diligence processes to determine trustworthy and reliable instruction and advice that supports their safeguarding responsibilities. This involves complying with legislation and taking directions as signposted through Government guidance and statutory frameworks relevant to their geographic contexts across the UK.

Authenticity can often be supported through local expectations communicated by Local Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) and local authorities. For example, the EYFS makes clear the expectation for providers to 'take advice from the LSP or local authority' on appropriate child protection training.

This provides legitimacy for the source and content that leaders rely upon to inform their own practice. It also demonstrates leadership accountability and recognises the value of partnership working and wider influence.

Being genuinely inclusive

When leaders determine the varying needs of those within their teams, they will adapt their strategies accordingly.

Recognising that one size does not fit all when it comes to team development is the first step towards creating a conducive approach that benefits everyone regardless of an individual's knowledge, experience or competency.

Opportunities for leaders to provide targeted personal development within a whole-team approach include:

- Effective mentoring at all levels.
- Themed and purposeful team meetings.
- Prioritising and tailoring training to be meaningful and impactful for all.
- Creating a culture of self- and collective reflection that places responsibility upon individuals to drive their learning needs and goals and one that recognises when they have achieved targeted outcomes.
- Holding each other to account.
- Purposeful professional supervision and appraisal.

Enabling the workforce

Good leaders understand the value of recognising and utilising skills, expertise and qualities that are evident within the wider team. They are confident to share leadership responsibilities that not only ease their own workload but more importantly build potential in others.

Distributed leadership is a model that enables a range of objectives to take place. Contextualising this approach to that of leading safe practice means that while responsibility is maintained overall by one or more leader, accountability is shared, and those assigned leadership tasks learn by being able to engage more meaningfully.

When describing distributed leadership Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet (2014) state that 'leadership should be more participative than directive, more enabling than performing'.

Using this model not only results in safe practices becoming embedded in any one setting, it increases the likelihood of creating sustainable and enduring skills and competencies in the workforce overall. Safe practice areas where distributed leadership might be applied include:

- Managing and administering medications.
- Overseeing and managing food safety systems.
- Feeding back and summarising the content of training to the wider team.
- Speaking with other professionals about children's welfare.
- Contributing to multi-agency processes, reports or attending meetings.

- Deputising in the absence of named DSLs in the setting.

Strategies for taking the lead with other professionals outside of the setting

We often don't consider leadership beyond that of our own teams or those for which we have managerial responsibility. Yet leadership potential reaches far beyond our own organisation, especially when we work in the early years.

Collaborative working is a powerful strategy which both enhances and strengthens our work. In the absence of directives or joined-up working initiatives, it is imperative that leaders take the steps needed to build and nurture relationships with other professionals.

Being prepared to take the lead and reach out to others shows resourcefulness and recognises the values that come from sharing expertise and unique positions of influence to achieve healthy and safe outcomes for children. Collaborative leadership can be demonstrated in various contexts:

- Undertaking and fulfilling the role of the lead practitioner in early help assessment and team around the family processes.
- Seeking ways of optimising shared agendas such as reaching out to collaborate with health professionals, family hubs, local authorities and commissioned services such as those that support victims of domestic abuse or children with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Representation on local authority governance stakeholder groups and forums such as LSPs or Safeguarding Boards to help design and inform service delivery with early years in mind.

When leaders are confident in their own leadership skills and abilities, they recognise the value of collaborative leadership. They will appreciate the shared learning opportunities and create ways that enable everyone to work together with openness and transparency. Leaders will be prepared to challenge their own and each other's perspectives and points of views to determine what is best for children.

'Collaborate' is one of the five multi-agency expectations recognised in the new statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023). While this refers to safeguarding and child protection work, the guidance instructs practitioners working with the same child and family to 'share information to get a complete picture of what life is like for the child'. It directs practitioners to 'collectively ensure the child's voice is at the centre and the right support is provided'.

Collaborative leadership in the early years always centres on the needs of children and uses this stance to drive forward its agenda. This is particularly important when challenges or differences of opinions or conflicting priorities arise.

REFERENCES

- Siraj-Blatchford I. and Hallet E. (2014) Effective and Caring Leadership in the Early Years. Sage
- HM Government (2023) Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023: A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children
- Rachel Buckler (2023) Developing Child-Centred Practice for Safeguarding and Child Protection: Strategies for every early years setting. Routledge

Rachel Buckler is a consultant and trainer

CASE STUDY: Laura Tingey, head of early years and compliance at Acorn Early Years

I asked Laura Tingey about the leadership strategies that underpin safe practice. I also asked how Acorn ensured that practice was informed and grounded in authentically sourced guidance and principles.

Laura explained, 'We foster autonomy within our leadership teams to develop personal, team and strategic leadership. Some of these elements include:

- Supporting our leaders to create and develop a shared vision of safe practices and how these can be implemented through policies, local and government guidance.
- Expecting them to develop and show integrity and accountability with strong ethical principles.
- Encouraging leaders to act decisively on decision-making processes and who needs to be involved.
- Building resilience and wellbeing among wider teams.'

She went on to say that safer practices are at the forefront of thinking, and that shared policies, procedures and processes are discussed with leaders.

'It is extremely important that we are fully aware of all legislation and guidance, which we do through external training and taking the time to read through it thoroughly,' Laura said.

'Our local authorities have different principles and guidelines, which we follow. Notifications allow us to keep on top of any new developments or changes, but we also keep up to date using websites. We have nurseries in both affluent and deprived areas, which demonstrate a different demographic at times regarding safeguarding.'

She said they have noticed an increase in instances of domestic abuse and have been working closely with a local domestic abuse service.

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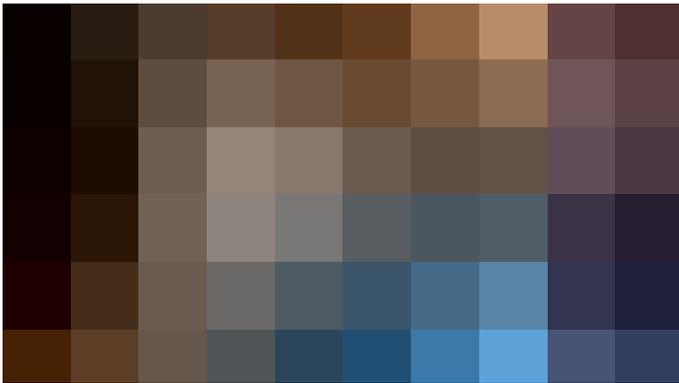
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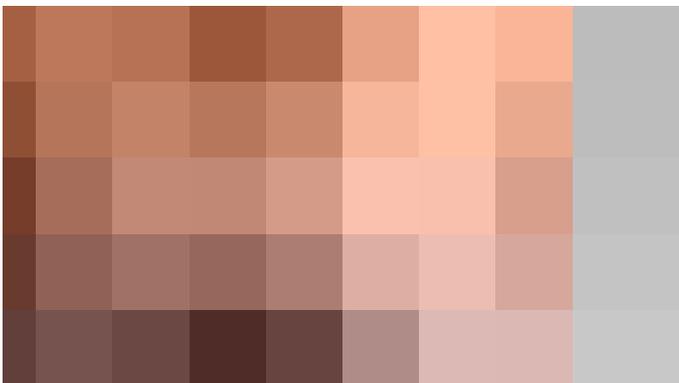
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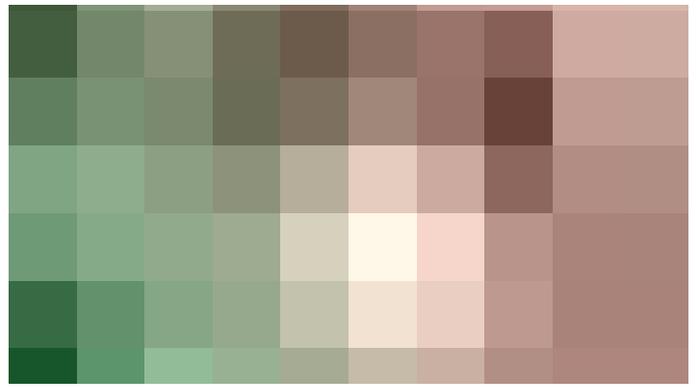
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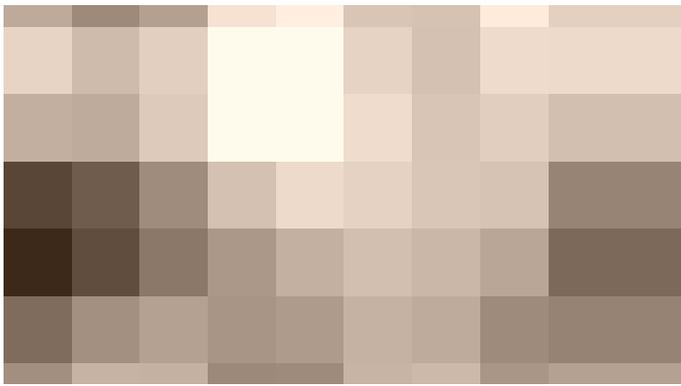
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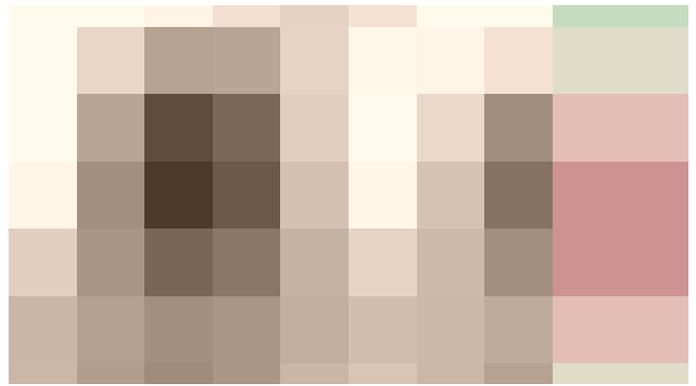
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