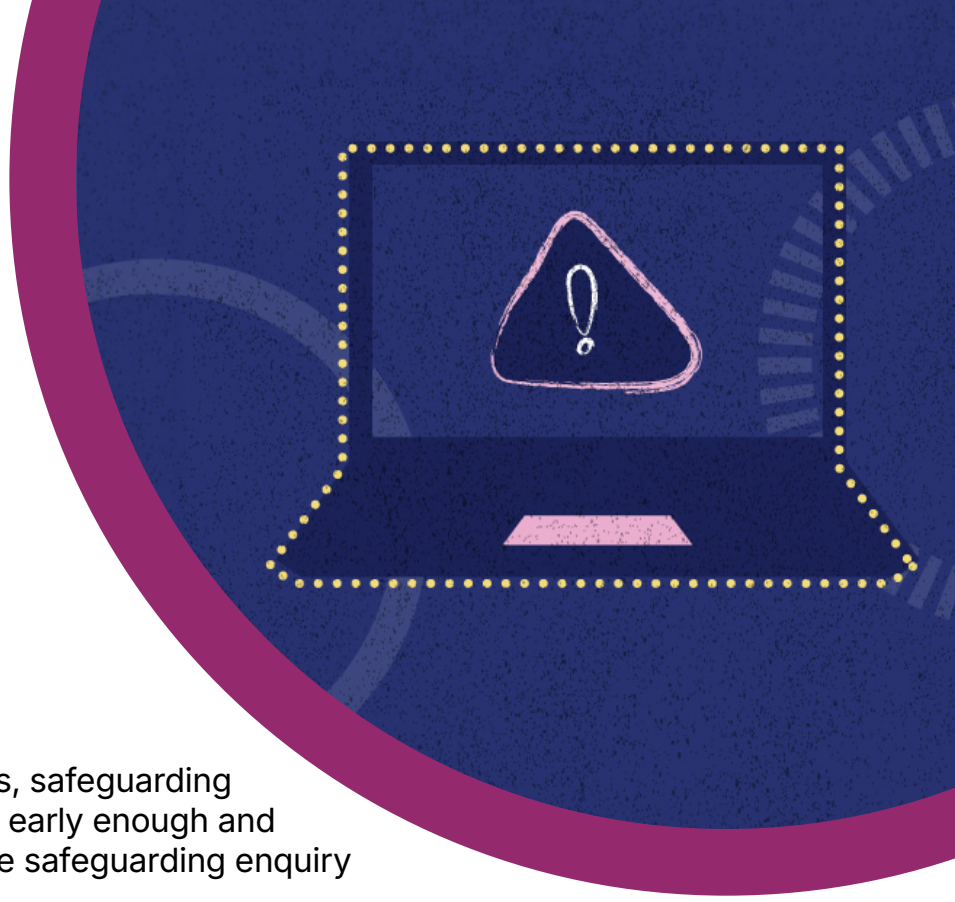
THE CHILD **SAFEGUARDING**
PRACTICE REVIEW PANEL

Safeguarding children from online harms



Reference guide for practitioners

As children's lives become increasingly digital and subject to online influences, safeguarding practice must keep pace. Online harm is not always recognised or understood early enough and can intensify existing vulnerabilities. Make children's online lives part of routine safeguarding enquiry and assessment.

Online harm is often missed

Children's digital lives are not always routinely explored.

- Risk may remain hidden
- Changes may be subtle
- Do not wait for disclosure before exploring concerns

Serious harm can occur in unseen digital spaces

Risks may not be immediately visible to parents, carers or practitioners.

- Harmful content, including self-harm or suicide
- Pressure, threats or control
- Grooming and exploitation

Online activity can intensify existing vulnerabilities

Separate experiences may interact and intensify over time.

- Notice patterns and changes
- Connect online and offline concerns
- Avoid viewing incidents in isolation

Online relationships are real relationships

They can be emotionally significant and may involve coercion, control or abuse.

- Take online relationships seriously
- Know who children are communicating with
- Explore pressure, threats or control

What practitioners should do

- Ask about online activity and relationships
- Ask open and curious questions
- Recognise patterns and escalation
- Consider online and offline experiences together
- Share information, coordinate action and respond to concerns
- Do not rely on disclosure alone

What reviews tell us

Rapid reviews received by the Panel between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025.

9% featured an online context

63% featuring online harms referenced child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation as a risk factor

29% featuring online harms involved the death of a child

Find more learning and resources

Access briefing papers, videos, learning materials and safeguarding review examples.

Scan the QR code or visit:

childsafeguarding.independent-panel.uk/hub-topic/online-harms/