

Child welfare services need radical changes to guard against abuse

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The research review, written for directors and senior managers in children's services, is called *Safeguarding in the 21st Century - where to next?* and was commissioned by research in practice, the leading research utilisation agency in England and Wales. It was carried out by Professor Jane Barlow, Professor of Public Health in the Early Years at the University of Warwick's Warwick Medical School.

The report outlines that current risk assessment procedures are not yet in line with policy aimed at improving provision, and sets out a new vision for children's services and [social work](#). The research review points to the need for integrated assessments that focus better on parenting capacity, parent-child interaction and parental readiness and capacity for change.

It shows that we need to move away from the managerialism and proceduralism that characterise much safeguarding practice towards a model in which managers support 'reflective' and 'relationship-based' practitioners as well as evidence-based programmes.

The report comes at the same time as Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove has commissioned his own review, looking at how to remove the barriers and bureaucracy which prevent social workers spending valuable time with vulnerable children.

The science is now very clear that early environment and the first three years play a major role in shaping children's cognitive, behavioural, social and emotional development. Early parenting makes a difference to

how small children's brains develop.

Professor Barlow said pregnancy and the first three years should be central to safeguarding practice as the best time for prevention and early intervention - and the time to remove a child if the family can't change despite being supported to do so.

Professor Barlow said: "Things have improved over the last ten years but there are still real tensions in the system. This review calls for new ways of working with families in which [child abuse](#) is a concern. Our vision needs to include a greater focus on the first three years of life, a move from short-term 'solution focused' approaches to more long-term 'relationship-based' practice, and interventions that focus on bringing about change in parenting and the parent-child relationship.'

The research review calls for new organisational and professional approaches to promote these ways of working, and support for the child protection workforce to develop skills in these areas.

Welcoming the research review Andrew Webb, Stockport Council's Corporate Director for Children and Young People's services said: 'I suspect there has rarely been a more timely and welcome publication on this subject for leaders of safeguarding policy and practice. Directors of Children's Services, councillors and senior colleagues across the children's sector have a clear duty to reassure themselves that services are focused and informed by the best and latest evidence. This review places its recommendations firmly in the political and social reality of today. It provides us with both the evidence and the insight we need to make sound strategic decisions, and provides managers and practitioners with the platform they require to build effective services.'

Provided by University of Warwick

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