



Information for families living in Scotland

Taking Care of Children

This leaflet tells you about Scotland's laws on protecting and caring for children and young people. It also tells you about what is expected of adults who look after children.

In Scotland, the law says parents must:

- Promote the general welfare, health and full development of their children and
- Protect them from harm

Anyone who cares for a child is also responsible for making sure they are safe and well at all times.

The Law

In Scotland, generally speaking, a child is someone who is under the age of 18.

The law on children and young people in Scotland is based on the principles that:

- The child's welfare comes first
- All children have a right to be protected from all forms of abuse, neglect or exploitation
- Parents should normally be responsible for bringing up their children

There are various laws in Scotland, which are designed to make sure that children and teenagers are properly protected and cared for. The Police are responsible for enforcing these laws, but all agencies and public bodies have responsibilities in making sure that the laws aren't broken. We also recognise that it is everyone's job to make sure that children and young people are safe whether they are parents or members of the public.

Physical punishment of children

In Scotland it is against the law for anyone to physically punish a child or young person.

Child Protection Services will investigate any signs that a child has been physically abused/assaulted.

Children left alone

You should never leave young children alone, not even for a short period of time. The Police will investigate (and legal action may be taken) if a child is injured or harmed because they have been left alone.

- Always leave your child in the care of an adult
- You should always make sure that anyone who looks after your child is responsible and that you trust them.
- Never leave your child with a stranger.

Children and work

In Scotland, children under the age of 13 are not allowed to work. No child under 16 may be employed before 7am or after 7pm. Children under 16 are not allowed to work more than 2 hours a day on any day, excluding Saturday, when they are allowed to work up to 5 hours (if under 15) or 8 hours (if 15 or over).

Children cannot work during school hours and can only work 1 hour before school begins. It is prohibited for children to work in any industrial places (including factories and building sites) or in any work that is likely to harm their health, wellbeing or education.

Children and begging

In Scotland, it is illegal for parents and people who look after children to allow children to beg. It is a crime to make or allow children under the age of 16 beg. This means that parents are responsible for their children and may be prosecuted if they allow their children to beg. It is likely that if members of the public see children begging, they will tell the Police.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

It is a crime in Scotland:

- to do this operation
- to do this operation in a different country
- to arrange for this operation to be done in a different country even if it is legal there.

Female Genital Mutilation is extremely harmful. It can cause long-term mental and physical suffering. It violates the most basic of human rights and is illegal in Scotland.

Forced Marriages

Forced marriage is illegal in Scotland and is considered to be an abuse of human rights.

The Police will investigate if a crime has been reported where a child or young person has been forced to marry against their wishes.

Children who are forced into marriage or subjected to emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a result, are protected by law and abuse will be investigated by Child Protection Services.

Sexual activity and young people

It is an offence in Scotland for adults to have sexual relationships with children under the age of 16.

Young people have a natural interest in sex and sexual relationships. They have a right to receive Health Education, support and protection. This is recognised by the Education and Health Services in Scotland.

However, adults have a responsibility to identify when any relationships with young people may be abusive or exploitative. Adults should respond and offer support if they think this is happening. In such cases adults must always think about reporting the matter to the authorities so that the young person concerned can be properly protected.

It is important to know that adults may "groom" or prepare children and young people with the aim of harming them. "Grooming" is where adults contact and make friends with a child or young person so that they can sexually abuse them. If you believe that your child or another child is being contacted in this way, get advice and support and always report this to the Police.

Your responsibility

If you are a parent or caregiver, you are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of your children.

Normally, parents meet their responsibilities with no need for state agencies to get involved. It is important in Scotland that the conduct of family life is usually left to parents and family members. However, it is equally important that protecting children and young people and keeping them well is a priority for everyone.

If you need any assistance about any of these issues, there are a number of agencies which can help.

Social Work

Duty and Child Protection Team: 01506 284 440

Out-of-hours Social Work (evenings, weekends and national holidays): 01506 281 028/9

You can also get advice from Health Visitors, Midwives, Teachers and staff in Third Sector/Voluntary organisations

Police: 101

Emergency services: Police, Fire Service, Ambulance: 999

Health Services

NHS 24 (open 24 hours) - 111

To register with a GP see : <https://services.nhslothian.scot/gps/patient-registration/>

West Lothian Council: <https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/>

Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault Team: 01506 281 055

Childline: 0800 1111

Parentline: 08000 28 22 33

Advice Shop: 01506 283 000

Citizen's Advice Bureau: 01506 432977

Scottish Domestic Abuse & Forced Marriage helpline: 0800 027 1234