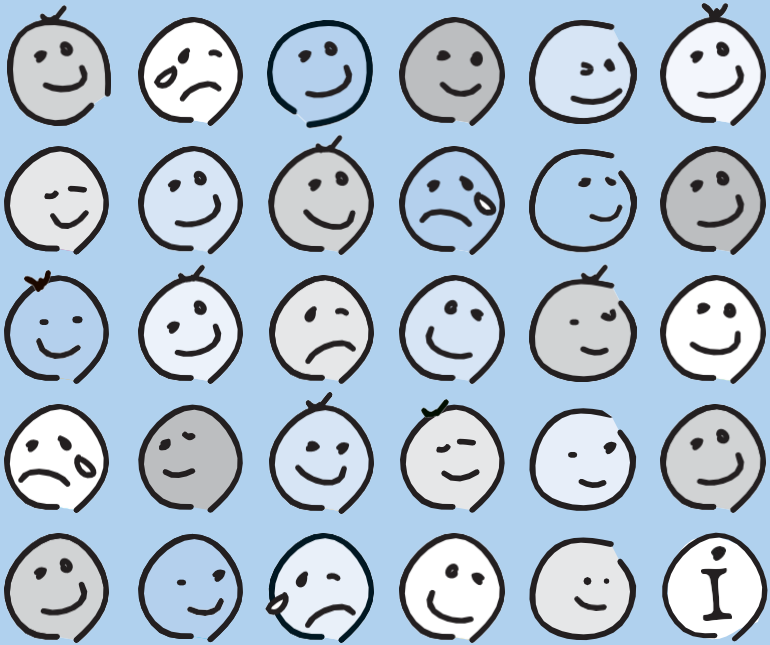


TAKING CARE OF CHILDREN



information for  
families living  
in Scotland

## Taking Care of Children: Information for families living in Scotland

**This leaflet gives basic information about the laws concerning the care and protection of children and young people living in Scotland. It also provides information about what is expected of adults caring for children.**

In Scotland, parents have a legal responsibility to:

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

Equally, anyone caring for children has a responsibility to ensure their safety and wellbeing at all times.

### The Law

In Scotland, a child is under the age of 16. However, under certain legal criteria can also include children up to the age of 21. The law affecting children and young people in Scotland is founded on the principles that the welfare of the child is paramount

- All children have a right to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect or exploitation
- Parents should normally be responsible for the upbringing of 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 Local Authorities and the Police are largely responsible for enforcing these laws, but all agencies and public bodies have responsibilities in ensuring that the requirements of the law are met. Also, we recognise in Scotland that it is everyone's responsibility to make sure that children and young people are safe whether parents or members of the public.

## Physical punishment of children

All forms of physical punishment of children are against the law in Scotland. Children have the same legal protection from assault as adults.

Our laws say that it is illegal to use physical punishment against a child and the police can charge a parent or carer with assault against a child. Parents or carers charged with assault cannot use the defence of 'reasonable chastisement'.

The use of 'physical chastisement' as a defence against an assault charge was removed from law in November 2020. Any indication of the physical abuse of children will be investigated by child protection services.

## Children left unattended

You should never leave young children unattended, even for short periods of time and it is advised not to leave children at home alone. The Police will investigate and legal action may be taken if anything goes wrong in your absence, or if a child is injured or harmed as a result of being left alone.

**Always leave your child in the care of a trusted adult. You should always take steps to satisfy yourself that anyone else who may be looking after your child is responsible and trustworthy. Never leave your child with a stranger.**

## The employment of children

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 be employed to work during school hours and can only work 1 hour before school begins. It is prohibited for children to work in any industrial setting (including factories and building sites) or in any work that is likely to be harmful to their health, wellbeing or education.

## Children begging

Culturally, in Scotland, it is not acceptable for parents and carers to allow children to beg. Indeed, it is an offence in Scotland to cause or allow children under the age of 16 to be used for begging. This means that parents are responsible for their children and will be prosecuted should they allow their children to beg. It is very likely that if members of the public were to see children begging, they would inform the police.

## Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

It is an offence in Scotland to carry out this procedure or carry it out (or arrange to carry it out) abroad, even in countries where this may be legal.

**Female Genital Mutilation is extremely harmful, causing long-term mental and physical suffering. It violates the most basic of human rights and is forbidden in Scotland.**

## Forced Marriages

Forced marriage is not condoned in Scotland and is considered to be an abuse of human rights.

The Police will investigate criminal offences that have been committed in order to force a child or young person to marry against their wishes.

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

## Sexual activity and young people

In Scotland, anyone under the age of 16 is deemed in law as unable to give consent, and therefore, any sexual intercourse where there is no consent will be regarded as a criminal offence.

**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 and have a right to receive Health Education, support and protection and this is recognised with the Education and Health Services in Scotland.**

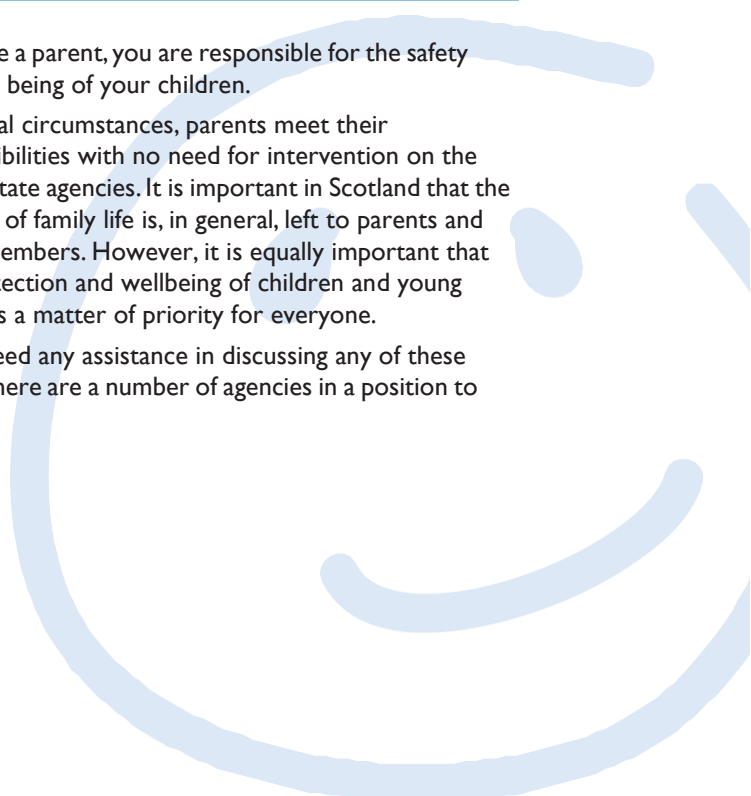
However, adults have a responsibility to identify when any relationships with young people may be abusive or exploitative. Adults should respond and offer support if this is thought to be the case. On such occasions adults must always consider reporting the matter to the authorities so that the young person concerned can be properly protected. It is important to know that adults may groom children and young people with the intention of causing them harm. "Grooming" can be described as the behaviour of adults who may contact, befriend and associate with a child or young person with the intent of sexually abusing them. If you are concerned that your child or another child is being contacted in this way, seek advice and support and always report this to the Police.

### **Your responsibility**

If you are a parent, you are responsible for the safety and well being of your children.

In normal circumstances, parents meet their responsibilities with no need for intervention on the part of state agencies. It is important in Scotland that the conduct of family life is, in general, left to parents and family members. However, it is equally important that the protection and wellbeing of children and young people is a matter of priority for everyone.

If you need any assistance in discussing any of these issues, there are a number of agencies in a position to help





## USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

**POLICE:**  
101

**POLICE EMERGENCY:**  
999

**NSPCC:**  
0808 800 5000

**DOMESTIC ABUSE &  
FORCED MARRIAGE:**  
NATIONAL HELPLINE  
0800 027 1234

**COMMITTED TO  
ENDING ABUSE (CEA):**  
01324 635661

**VICTIM SUPPORT  
SCOTLAND:**  
NATIONAL HELPLINE  
0800 160 1985  
FALKIRK HELPLINE:  
01324 614026

### **SOCIAL WORK SERVICES:**

**FALKIRK**  
01324 506070

OUT OF OFFICE HOURS, EVENINGS,  
WEEKENDS AND NATIONAL  
HOLIDAYS:  
01786 470500

**HEALTH SERVICES**  
NHS 24 (OPEN 24HRS)  
111

**TO REGISTER WITH A GP IN  
THE FALKIRK AREA -**

**PRACTITIONERS SERVICE:**  
0345 300 1024

**HOSPITALS PROVIDING  
SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN  
FALKIRK AND DISTRICT:**

**FORTH VALLEY ROYAL  
HOSPITAL**  
01324 566000

**FALKIRK COMMUNITY  
HOSPITAL**  
01324 624000

**STIRLING COMMUNITY  
HOSPITAL**  
01786 434000

**HEALTH EMERGENCY  
(AMBULANCE): 999**

**HOUSING SERVICES  
(ADVICE / ONE STOP SHOP):**

**Advice/Support  
Hubs.**

**Central Advice and  
Support Hub**  
01324 506070

**East Advice and  
Support Hub**  
01324 506070

**West Advice and  
Support Hub**  
01324 506070

**HOUSING SERVICES  
(HOMELESSNESS):**

**During Office hours – 01324  
506070 (Homeless Service -  
Housing Needs)**

**Outwith Office Hours – 0800  
587 4440**

**EDUCATION SERVICES:**

**TO REGISTER A CHILD IN A  
LOCAL AUTHORITY SCHOOL**  
01324 506600

**BI-LINGUAL AND TRAVELLER  
SUPPORT SERVICE**  
01324 501978

**PARENTLINE:**  
NATIONAL HELPLINE  
0800 028 2233

**CHILDLINE:**  
NATIONAL HELPLINE  
0800 1111

**LGBT Helpline Scotland:**  
0300 123 2523

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

[www.falkirk.gov.uk](http://www.falkirk.gov.uk)

If you would like this information in another language, Braille, LARGE PRINT or audio, please contact your local Social Work office.

[www.falkirk.gov.uk](http://www.falkirk.gov.uk)

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