

# Welcome to the UK

## Parenting in the UK



(\*Parenting = the activity of bringing up a child as a parent)



All parents want their children to be safe, healthy and happy with opportunities for their future. But they face many challenges in a new country where there are different laws, different systems, different expectations and of course a different language. This leaflet gives important information about bringing up a child in the UK. It looks at the education system, to help you support your child's learning and future. And it looks at some of the laws designed to protect children from physical and emotional harm, which affect the way parents are expected to supervise and discipline their children.

This information was selected by people who themselves sought asylum in the UK, based on what they wish they'd known when they first arrived. Knowing this early can help prevent problems arising because what seems normal to you might actually create trouble here.

### Going to school

Under UK law, children must be in full-time education between the ages of 5 and 16, and children over 16 and up to 18 must be in some form of education or training. Parents are legally required to ensure their child goes to school. It's not a choice. Missing school means a child can fall behind on their learning. You shouldn't keep a child at home unless there's a valid reason, and you've informed the school. Parents can be fined or issued with court orders otherwise. Schools monitor attendance closely so it's vital you call the school by 8.30 to explain if your child can't attend. More information at <https://www.gov.uk/browse/childcare-parenting/schools-education>



### Protecting children from physical and emotional harm ('Safeguarding')

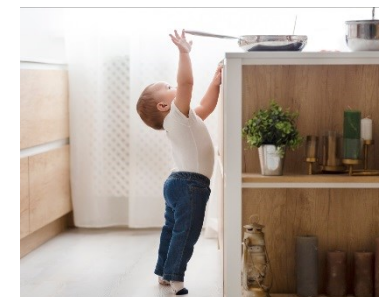
The role local authorities play in the life of a child in the UK might be quite different to your home country. Many people find them much more involved in a child's life and with more powers to intervene when they believe a child is at risk of harm. Parents are responsible for making sure their children safe and well, but Local Authorities also have a legal duty to protect and promote the welfare of children in their area. Health Visitors, Teachers, Social Workers, the Local Council and the Police all play a role in identifying and supporting children considered at risk. They monitor for signs of child abuse or neglect, such as unexplained injuries, emotional distress, being unclean or hungry or being left unsupervised on their own. If a school, or a health visitor, or a members of the public reports concerns about a child's safety and wellbeing to the police or social workers, they must investigate. They'll visit the parents to explore these concerns and discuss if any changes need to be made to remove continuing risk. But if they believe the child is still at risk of harm, they have the

legal power to remove the child from the family and place them into the care of the local council.

So the UK law on protecting children from abuse and neglect affects how closely parents are expected to supervise a child, and how they discipline them.

### Supervising children

If a parent fails to supervise a child so that it places them at risk of harm, they'll be considered negligent. For example, an unsupervised child is at risk of harm if they don't recognise danger, don't know how to avoid it or what to do in an emergency. National guidelines state that babies and very young children should never be left alone, even for 15 minutes. Children under 12 are rarely mature enough to be left alone, or to look after younger children, or cook for themselves without adult supervision. Children under 16 shouldn't be left alone overnight. The law doesn't give an exact age when a child can be left alone safely, as it recognises children mature at a different rate. So a parent must consider their child's maturity and remove risks, such as sharp knives or an open window a child could fall out of and make sure they know what to do in an emergency.



Young children should also be supervised when playing outside, such as in a park. Primary Schools expect parents to accompany their child to school and collect them. Each school will have its own policy on when they consider it safe for a child to be unaccompanied. You'll need to inform the school if you arrange for someone else to collect your child, as schools will never let a child leave with a stranger.

All this may contrast with what's acceptable in your country, where children may be given responsibility at an earlier age. But it's very important to understand the different approach in the UK and its implications for parenting.

More information at <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/>

### Disciplining children

As in many countries around the world, attitudes towards using physical punishment to discipline children, such as smacking, have changed in the UK. It's now seen as abusive and harmful. The simplest message is **parents should not use, or threaten to use, any form of physical punishment to discipline their children.**

No form of punishment should ever leave a child with swelling, bruises, cuts, reddening of the skin, abrasions or scratches. Local authorities must investigate any reports it receives about a child being smacked. If they believe the child is at risk of further abuse they may remove the child





into care. This is especially likely if any implement is used to smack the child, such as a spoon, belt or shoe.

So if you used to rely on using physical punishment to manage your child's behaviour, support does exist to help parents understand and use alternative methods now you're here in the UK. You can contact or ask to be referred to your local council's Early Help Team. They'll explain methods that use learning and reward in place of physical

punishment. They run workshops for parents and they can even come to your home to help you practice the methods.

See more information at <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/early-help-early-intervention> and at <https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/primary/behaviour/positive-discipline/>

It can be useful to reflect that children who've experienced trauma, such as war and losing their home, can be deeply emotionally affected. This can lead to behaviour that is particularly difficult and challenging for parents. Adults are also affected by fear and loss, and will be additionally stressed and anxious whilst waiting for a decision on their asylum claim. Not being allowed to work during this time means parents may be together in the house 24/7. All this can lead to heightened tensions in the home, and parents may be quicker to react to things and with more anger than usual. Others who've been through your experience recommend making links with local social networks and activities that take you out of the house and can help you manage stress in your life. You can find information about these in the Local Welcome Pack provided by your housing provider, and on the Migration Partnership's website.

Parents worried about the impact of trauma on their child can contact the Young Minds free helpline for confidential, expert advice. See <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-helpline/>

### Building a relationship with the school and Social Workers

Schools must monitor children for signs of abuse and neglect. Teachers are required to record any concerns on a central computer system. The school will contact parents to discuss multiple or recurring concerns and try to find out what's happening. If parents are struggling or are unaware of what's expected in the UK, the school can offer support from an Early Help Team who 'll create a support plan for the family. But if parents don't communicate with the school or don't take up the support offer, the school will refer their concerns to a Social Worker.

Some issues will trigger an automatic referral from the school to a Social Worker. These are concerns about child abuse. If a child says "my mother hit me" or "she threatened to hit me with a spoon" or has an injury or mark for which there's no reasonable explanation, the school has a duty to refer this to a Social Worker. This is why it's vital for parents to call the school by 08.30 to inform them of any injury or mark and explain how it happened. Parents with limited English should ask someone to help with the message.



The Social Worker will contact the parents to explore the concerns and develop a plan of action to improve the care of the child if needed. It can be alarming, but the best reaction is to listen to the Social Worker's concerns, be willing to discuss them to uncover any issues that may be putting the child's safety at risk and be open to identifying remedies. It may mean parents need to change the way they do things. Parents can be linked to support to help them meet that challenge. But if parents stay silent the Social Worker can't deliver their child protection duty, which is to satisfy themselves that a child is safe from harm. If they can't investigate, they can't eliminate risks to the child, so they're more likely to have to seek removal of the child from the family. No one wants this to happen of course. Whatever the concern, intervention will always escalate if parents don't engage in discussions or accept offers of support or change the way they do things.

### Relations between parents at home



Children can suffer serious and long lasting emotional harm if they witness or hear violence or other abuse going on between their parents, even if the child is not itself the target of that abuse. Evidence shows Domestic Abuse can seriously affect their lives, particularly if exposed to it at a very young age. It can affect their ability to focus and progress at school, and lead to depression and eating disorders and more aggressive or withdrawn behaviour. Children are also more likely to be affected by violence as adults, both as perpetrators and victims. Domestic Abuse is against the law. If police or Social Workers investigating reports of domestic abuse

find a child is living there, they can decide that one of the parents needs to leave the home to prevent further risk of harm to the child, or remove the child into local council care.

### Female circumcision

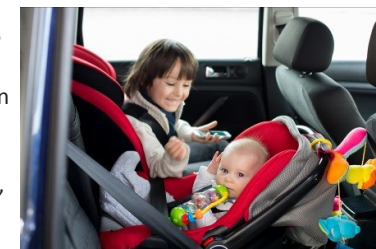
It's illegal to arrange, perform, help or encourage Female Circumcision, known in the UK as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). It is considered a form of child abuse as it causes long lasting physical and emotional harm to the child. The penalty is up to 14 years in prison.

### Children and cars

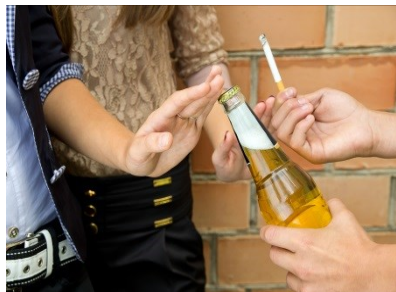


To protect their health, it's illegal to smoke or allow smoking if there's a child under the age of 18 in the car. Babies and children under the age of 12 or under 125cm tall must be in an appropriate child seat.

Exceptions are only made in an emergency, an unexpected journey over a short distance or if a taxi driver doesn't provide child seats.



## Helping your child keep within the law



Parents can ensure their child knows how UK law differs from what they're used to. Tell them it's illegal for anyone under 18 to buy alcohol or cigarettes. And it's illegal for any adult to buy these for them. Anyone caught using, possessing or selling illegal drugs can be arrested, including if someone else asks them to deliver any drugs. It's illegal to have sex with anyone, male or female, who's under 16 even if they're willing. Sex with anyone over 16 must be with their consent, otherwise it's sexual assault or rape for which the penalty can be up to 15 years in prison. Young people can marry when they're 16 if they have their parents' consent, otherwise at 18.

## Protecting your child from bullying, hate and cyber abuse

Encourage your child to share any concerns about the way other children treat them at school. If another child is targeting them, to hurt them physically or emotionally, this is called 'Bullying'. If they're being targeted because of their race or religion this is called 'Hate'. Both are very damaging the child's wellbeing and need to be stopped. You shouldn't try to deal with it yourself, by approaching



the other child or its parents. You should ask to

talk to the class teacher to make them aware of what's happening and discuss what actions the school can take to prevent it happening again. All schools will have a behaviour policy, and a duty of care for your child. If the abuse recurs, ask to speak to the school head of year. You can also talk to the police, especially for more serious abuse such as violence, theft, intimidation, harassment and hate crime. For more advice on how parents can protect their child from bullying see <https://www.bullying.co.uk/bullying-at-school/advice-on-contacting-your-child-s-school-about-bullying/>



Children go online at a young age and quickly learn to explore the web and social media apps via their smartphones or other digital devices. They can be at risk from cyber bullying and abuse and from accessing inappropriate and harmful material. This is a real worry for all parents and can have a serious impact on a child's confidence, self-esteem and health. Again, encourage your child to share concerns with you. There are organisations that provide practical tips for parents to manage these risks and report incidents so action can be taken to prevent it happening again. See <https://www.bullying.co.uk/cyberbullying/>

## Parents and children's rights

If a local authority is investigating concerns about a child's safety, both the parents and the child have rights. Professionals will talk to both the parents and the child. They'll try to find out what the child wants to happen, as the child has the right to be heard in any protection decision made about their future. Parents have the right to ask for an interpreter to ensure they can understand information



given to them and can

express themselves clearly. Only sign documents if you understand their meaning and any consequences. If a protection case is made, parents are entitled to legal representation by a Family Law solicitor. It may be free under the Legal Aid scheme if you're on Home Office asylum support. The Social Worker should give you information about this and you can also get free, impartial, independent and confidential information and advice from your nearest Citizens Advice Bureau.



Full details on all the issues covered in this leaflet can be found in the 'Parenting in the UK' e-learning resource on the North East Migration Partnership website. <https://www.nemp.org.uk/>