

# Hidden Child Guidance

## Background

**Children of any age can be unknown to agencies like health and social care.**

For example, when the adults who care for them elect to live off grid or follow alternative lifestyles. Most will be well looked after but, in a tiny minority of circumstances adults can sometimes hide children away from professionals to conceal abuse and/or prevent other issues like trafficking coming to light.

The **aim** of this guidance is **not** to force parents to comply with agencies, but rather to assist frontline practitioners (including childminders, nurseries, non-statutory bodies, community centres, housing services, police etc.) identify hidden children potentially at risk of harm and demonstrate how to raise such concerns with agencies who have a responsibility to safeguard children.

## Raise a Concern

**If you are worried about a vulnerable child and would like help, please do not stay silent.**

- Please visit the **SSCP Report a Concern** page for more information on appropriate steps.

## Factors to Consider

**Things to consider when looking at children potentially hidden from services:**

- Remember: children's rights (to healthcare etc.) always take precedence over those of adults. For example, babies and toddlers cannot speak for themselves, and it is easy for their needs to get lost amongst a clamour of adult concerns.
- Some families choose to live off-grid, but it is completely acceptable to exercise your professional curiosity and check if a child is being hidden to conceal abuse or trafficking.
- Do not assume others will spot a hidden child who are better placed to raise concerns than you. Your concerns will be taken seriously, and you may be a child's only chance.
- For babies, time is important. What would be a slight delay for an adult can have serious consequences for a baby, so there is need to act swiftly where you think a hidden child is at risk.
- You do not need to know a child's name, gender, birth date or NHS number to raise concerns.

## Who to Contact

**Who should I contact if I have concerns?**

- If you become aware of a child you think is being hidden, talk it through and seek advice from a colleague/manager/agency safeguarding lead.
- You might also want to look at the **SSCP Effective Support** document to support with this.

## What to Look For

**Things to look for when considering whether a child is potentially being hidden from services:**

- Where you know a pregnancy has been concealed.
- Where parents have declined care within pregnancy and delivery.
- Where parents do not register the birth of a child or register the child with a GP.
- Parents or carers decline or avoid contact with professionals.
- Where parents or carers appear to be moving around in order to prevent the child being seen.
- Where neighbours, friends, relatives and other members of the community tell you that they suspect a child is being concealed.
- Where parents or carers will not engage with you/let you see the child and give you insufficient or inconsistent information for you to make informed decisions.
- Where there are additional concerns, such as parental beliefs (for example, about diet or health care) which impact negatively on their children.
- Where your experience gives you additional cause for concern.

