

# information sharing guidance

## Fact sheet



**Sharing information is essential to enable early intervention for people who need additional services to achieve positive outcomes. It is vital for providing effective and efficient services that are coordinated around the needs of an individual or family and for safeguarding and protecting the welfare of individuals.**

**It is important that practitioners understand why, when and how they should share information so that they can do so confidently and appropriately as part of their day-to-day practice.**

### Background

Improving information sharing practice is a cornerstone of the government's strategy to improve outcomes for all people. This is exemplified in the *Every Child Matters* strategy (2003) and in more recent policy and guidance including the *HM Government Information Sharing Vision Statement* (2006), the *Children's Plan* (2007) and the *Think Family* reports (2006, 2008).

The government recognises it is important people remain confident their personal data is kept safe and secure and practitioners maintain the privacy rights of the individual, whilst sharing information to deliver better services.

Many practitioners recognise the importance of information sharing and there is much good practice. However there is also uncertainty

around the legal framework, particularly as children's services move towards more multi-agency working.

*Information Sharing: Practitioners' guide* (2006) was the first cross-government guidance for practitioners across the whole of the children's workforce. This guidance has now been updated to extend its relevance to practitioners working with adults and families as well as children and young people.

### Aims of the guidance

Most decisions to share information require professional judgement. The information sharing guidance aims to improve practice by giving practitioners clear advice on when and how they can share information, and help them to understand the circumstances when sharing information is inappropriate. The guidance seeks to provide clarity on the legal framework for information sharing at the front-line and to develop practitioners' understanding and confidence in sharing information professionally and lawfully. It also complements and supports wider policies to improve information sharing across services for children and adults.

## Who is the guidance for?

The guidance is intended for practitioners who have to make decisions about sharing personal information on a case-by-case basis whether they are:

- working in the public, private or third sector;
- providing services to children, young people, adults and/or families; or
- working as an employee, a contractor or a volunteer.

This includes front-line staff working in health, education, schools, social care, youth work, early years, family support, offending and criminal justice, police, advisory and support services, culture and leisure. It is also for managers and advisers who support practitioners in their decision making and for others with responsibility for information governance.

The guidance may be less relevant for staff in agencies or government departments whose information sharing practice is governed by statute and specific policies or agreements.

## Guidance content

- *Information Sharing: Guidance for practitioners and managers*;
- *Information Sharing: Pocket guide* - a summary of the key decision making considerations;
- *Information Sharing: Case examples* - illustrating best practice in information sharing situations;

- *Information Sharing: Training materials* - available for local agency and multi-agency training, and for use by training providers; and
- *Information Sharing: Further guidance on legal issues* - a summary of the laws affecting information sharing.

## Developing the guidance

The development of the cross-government guidance was led jointly by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Communities and Local Government. Representatives from a wide range of government departments, professional and regulatory bodies and statutory and voluntary agencies across health, education, social care and justice also contributed to the development of the guidance.

## Endorsing the guidance

The guidance has been formally endorsed by a wide range of organisations across all sectors.

A copy of the guidance and further details about the endorsements can be obtained from [www.ecm.gov.uk/informationsharing](http://www.ecm.gov.uk/informationsharing)

For more resources and information visit the Children's Workforce Development Council website: [www.cwdcouncil.org.uk](http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk) or the Every Child Matters website: [www.ecm.gov.uk](http://www.ecm.gov.uk)

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