

1. Introduction

This guideline describes the process to be followed in University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust when an adult attends with mental health issues and they are known or believed to have contact with a child/ children

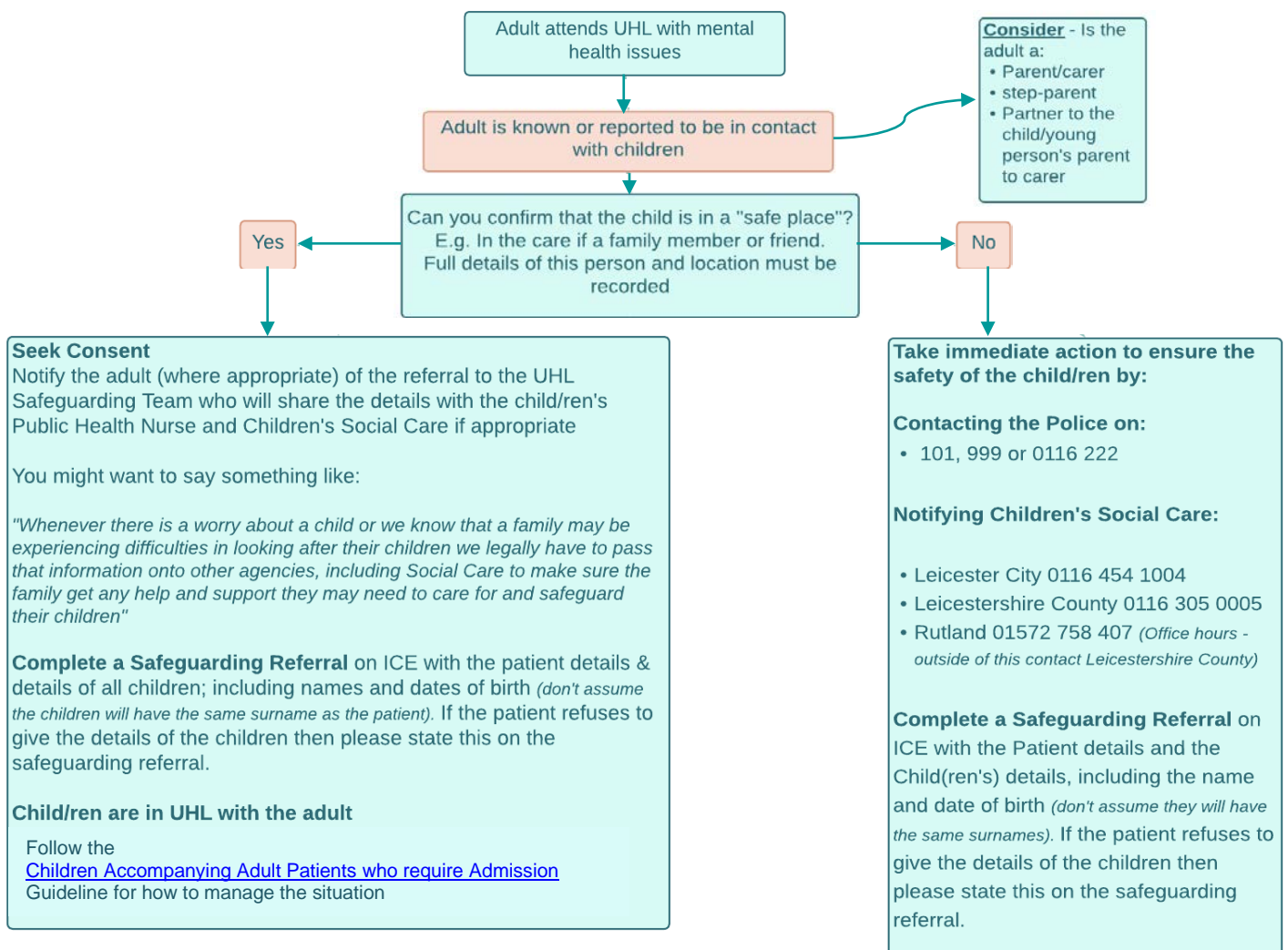
2. Scope

This guideline applies to all staff working with University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust.

3. Guideline Standards and Procedures

1 in 4 people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year. Just as our bodies can become unwell, so can our minds. Mental health is fluid and can change day to day, week to week and year to year. Many people with mental health problems are able to care for and safeguard their children and/or unborn child in their care. However, some people may require additional support and access to services to do this.

Health professionals may be the first to become aware that families are experiencing difficulties in looking after their children and as such they have a responsibility to share any concerns with agencies that can safeguard children and young people. **This responsibility includes acting on your concerns about a child or young person even if the child or young person is not your patient.** You do this by making a Safeguarding referral to the UHL Safeguarding Children Team on ICE or calling ext. 15770 for advice. Guidance and support regarding the referral process is also available in the [Safeguarding Children Policy](#).



Mental health problems can vary in terms of how severe they are and how they affect parents. They may need regular extra support, or be fine for long stretches and have periods when they need more help. Or other stressful life experiences may make things more challenging: for example, money problems or a relationship breakdown can negatively affect someone's mental health.

When unwell, parents/carers with mental health issues may find it difficult to:

- Deal with the daily challenges of parenting, for example if they have low energy because of depression or feel very worried because of anxiety
- Manage their mood or emotions around their children
- Care for their children, either physically or emotionally
- Manage their children's behaviour or set boundaries for them.
- They may need their children to help, e.g. getting younger siblings ready for school or doing housework.

Mental ill health in a parent or carer does not necessarily have an adverse impact on a child's development. Just as there is a range in severity of illness, so there is a range of potential impact on families. The majority of parents with a history of mental ill health present no risk to their children, however even in cases of low level concern; the needs of the child/ren should be paramount.

3.1 To determine how a parent/carer's mental problem may impact on their parenting ability and the child's development the following questions need to be considered within an assessment:

- Does the child take on roles and responsibilities within the home that are inappropriate?
- Does the parent/carer neglect their own and their child's physical and emotional needs?
- Does the mental health problem result in chaotic structures within the home with regard to meal and bedtimes, etc.?
- Does the parent/carer's mental health have implications for the child within school, attending health appointments etc.?
- Is there a lack of recognition of safety for the child?
- Does the parent/carer have an appropriate understanding of their mental health problem and its impact on their parenting capacity and on their child?
- Are there repeated incidents of hospitalisation for the parent/carer or other occasions of separation from the child?
- Does the parent/carer misuse alcohol or other substances?
- Does the parent/carer feel the child is responsible in some way for their mental health problem?
- Is the child included within any delusions of the parent/carer?
- Does the parent/carer's mental health problem result in them rejecting or being unavailable to the child?
- Does the child witness acts of violence or is the child subject to violence?
- Does the wider family understand the mental health problem of the parent/carer, and the impact of this on the parent/carer's ability to meet the child's needs?

- Is the wider family able and willing to support the parent/carer so that the child's needs are met?
- Does culture, ethnicity, religion or any other factor relating to the family have implications on their understanding of mental health problems and the potential impact on the child?
- How does the mental health impact on the family functions, including conflict, potential family break up etc.?

3.2 Action to be taken

- 3.2.1 When an adult attends the Emergency Department, is admitted to the hospital with mental health issues or these become apparent at any stage of their admission and they are known to have contact with children; a Safeguarding referral should be made on ICE for review by the Safeguarding Children Team.
- 3.2.2 Consent is required from the adult (who has parental responsibility) to make a safeguarding referral unless there are concerns for the safety of the child/ren. The UHL [Safeguarding Parental Responsibility](#) Guideline can offer support if unclear.
- 3.2.3 Where it is believed that a child of a parent with mental health problems may have suffered, or is likely to suffer significant harm, a referral will be made to Children's Social Care.
- 3.2.4 Health professionals should always use 'respectful uncertainty' and not readily accept parent / carer's assertions that their mental health problems are not affecting the care they provide to their children. Where there is any doubt in these situations, services should always err on the side of caution.
- 3.2.5 **If there are immediate concerns about the safety of the children, this should be immediately escalated to children's social care**
- Leicester City Children's Social Care – 0116 454 1004
 - Leicestershire County Children's Social Care – 0116 305 0005
 - Rutland Social Care – 01572 758 407 (*in hours only – out of hours call Leicestershire County Social Care*)
- and where required, the police via 101 or 0116 222 2222**

4. Education and Training

Training on this guidance is included within the UHL Safeguarding Children mandatory training programme accessed by all staff.

5. Monitoring and Audit Criteria

Key Performance Indicator	Method of Assessment	Frequency	Lead
Are referrals being made to the safeguarding team where an adult presents to the ED with mental health issues where they are known to be in contact with children/young people?	Audit	Bi-annually	Michelle Kelly

6. Supporting Documents and Key References

- University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust Safeguarding Children Policy
- Safeguarding Children Guideline 12: Children Accompanying Adult Patients Who Require Hospital Admission

7. Key Words

Safeguarding children, adult mental health

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This table is used to track the development and approval and dissemination of the document and any changes made on revised / reviewed versions

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