

# COMPLIANCE THROUGH CONNECTION: BUILDING THE "HOW" TO STRENGTHEN OUR PROTECTIVE CAPACITY TO SAFEGUARD EVERY CHILD



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# Table Of Contents

**01**

Introduction

**02**

Legislation

**03**

Why the "How" matters if we are to build connection

**04**

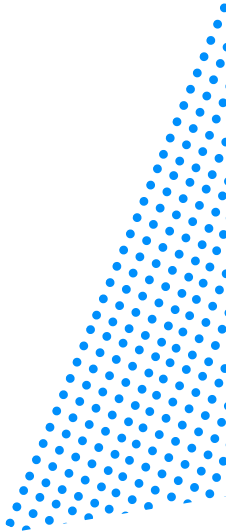
Listening: The safeguarding skill that leads to understanding

**05**

The RESPOND Framework  
Bridging compliance and connection

**06**

Compliance through connection



# 01 Introduction

Are we *doing things right* - complying with policy, procedure, and legislation?  
Are we doing the right thing - connecting with children and young people by understanding their 'living' experiences?

A failure to answer either question can have devastating consequences for both individuals and the organisations entrusted with their care. Yet, with limited time and growing complexity, this balance is becoming harder to achieve.

In just over a decade, Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) has expanded from 40 to more than 150 pages. In 2014, there were four primary safeguarding threats; by 2025, there are over forty. As recognition of harm has broadened, so too has the challenge: how do we remain compliant and compassionate - systematic and human?

This blog will look at how we can bridge these potentially competing narratives to increase our Protective Capacity as safeguarding professionals.

# 02 Legislation & Regulations

## **Does the regulatory environment help us connect as well as comply?**

Education regulations and policies in England are now more comprehensive than ever. From KCSIE and Working Together to Safeguard Children to model policies covering safeguarding, behaviour, RSE, attendance, health and safety, and staff conduct, the regulatory landscape is both extensive and detailed. Each framework defines **what** must be done, **when** it must happen, and **why** it matters, describing responsibilities, thresholds, and review cycles with impressive precision.

## **But across them all, something essential is missing — the "how"**

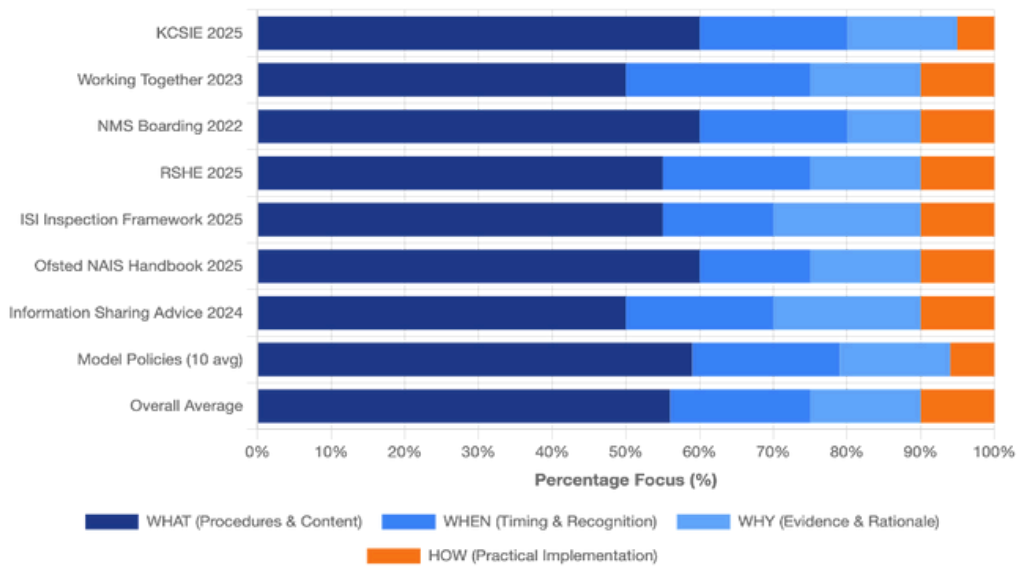
After analysing national and model documents across safeguarding, welfare, and education, the ratio is strikingly consistent:

The **What** ~56% | The **When** ~19% | The **Why** ~15% | The **How** ~10%

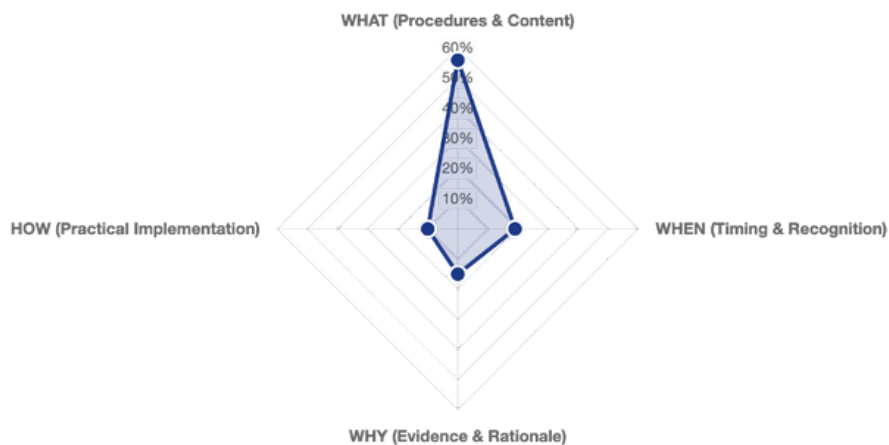
Ninety-four percent of the material tells professionals **what** to do - the actions, obligations, and duties they must fulfil; **when** to do it - the timing, frequency, or sequence of those actions; and **why** to do it - the purpose, rationale, or ethical justification. Fewer than ten percent of pages explain **how** to do it - how to engage, listen, balance tone, and build trust in those crucial moments when professional judgement truly matters.

**Policies are structurally clear but practically silent. They create compliance but not connection.**

Framework Focus Distribution Across All Major Safeguarding Policies



The Implementation Gap: Average Focus Across All Frameworks



## 03 Why the "How" matters if we are to build connection

The **"how"** is where safeguarding becomes human.

It's not the paragraph that says *"staff must act immediately"*, it's the few seconds after recognising harm, when a teacher must decide what to say next. It's not the bullet point that reads *"report to the DSL without delay"* — it's the pause, the breath, and the tone that determine whether a child feels believed, safe, and understood.

### The **"how"** shapes the quality of every interaction:

- How we listen when a pupil shares something difficult
- How we challenge language that harms
- How we follow up without fear of overreacting
- How we model safety in corridors, classrooms, and online spaces

Without it, safeguarding risks becoming a series of technical actions - correct and compliant, but emotionally hollow - leading to misunderstanding, disconnection, and ultimately, a loss of trust.

## 04 Listening: The safeguarding skill that leads to understanding

Striving to understand poses both the greatest challenge and the greatest opportunity for schools, colleges, and communities. Safeguarding is not only about responding to what we see, it's about understanding the worlds our young people move through, the social rules that shape their choices, and the contexts that influence their safety.

Carlene Firmin's guiding principle has never been more important or relevant:

***"We will not understand the everyday life experiences of young people unless we seek to understand the social rules that govern their lives."***  
(**Carlene Firmin, 2021**)

**The Student Voice** reinforces this message. Young people consistently say they don't always feel heard or understood, not because adults ignore policy, but because the system rarely teaches adults how to respond.

Authentic student voice depends on psychological safety: knowing that what you share will be met with calm, compassion, and proportionate action. That is a skill, not an instinct, and it's rarely written into policy.

When student voice is treated as integral, not additional, it becomes the heart of your safeguarding culture. It transforms abstract obligations into living relationships and connection.

## 05 The RESPOND Framework Bridging compliance and connection

The **RESPOND** Framework was developed to bridge the implementation gap between *compliance* and *connection*, increasing the relational protective capacity of organisations to both “**do things right**” and “**do the right thing**”.

**RESPOND** reframes safeguarding as a practical sequence of real-world actions. Each step translates policy guidance into daily, human, and relational opportunities to safeguard young people and children within their living context and experiences:

Where policies say, “*staff must act immediately*”, **RESPOND** guides what immediate action looks and sounds like. Where policies say, “*staff should record accurately*”, **RESPOND** defines how to capture accuracy through tone, context, transparency, and compliance.

# The RESPOND framework supports all key stakeholders and safeguarding professionals



## The RESPOND Framework supports:

- **Teachers** to act with confidence and care by turning safeguarding policy and process into clear, practical actions that enable effective, timely responses to every concern
- **DSLs** to lead from a place of compliance and care through an evidence-based framework that brings KCSIE and Working Together principles to life, inspiring confident leadership and a sustainable safeguarding culture.
- **Leadership and Governance** to do the right thing *and* do things right, by aligning safeguarding with strategic vision, accountability, and data-driven insight into impact and community needs.
- **MATs Safeguarding Leads** to unite their trust through a single cohesive framework, consistent in standards, flexible in context, and driven by a shared purpose.
- **Education and Safeguarding Partnerships** to collaborate with a shared language and structure, protecting children, and strengthening communities

The goal of **RESPOND** is to complement policy and strengthen practice, to embolden safeguarding professionals to apply guidance with confidence, agility, and care. *Compliance* keeps children safe in structure; *connection* keeps them safe in practice.

Imagine a future where systems value **how** as much as **what** - where professionals feel not only trained, but empowered, and where the culture is not only *compliant*, but also fully *connected*.

## 06 Compliance Through Connection

The next evolution of safeguarding and wellbeing in education won't come from more regulation. It will come from embedding the *human how* in every classroom interaction, pastoral meeting, and policy review.

Because safeguarding is about protecting children through *connection*, where what we do matters, but how we do it makes the difference.