

The definition of vulnerable children and families

There is not one way of measuring vulnerability. Research draws on the available information to calculate the number of vulnerable children and families living in a wide range of circumstances.

Key risk factors include(1):	
Individual	Child maltreatment including emotional, physical and sexual abuse Emotional and physical neglect Lower educational attainment Low self-esteem Impaired cognitive development Poor physical and mental health Poor language and communication skills Education, Health and Care Plan Disability School exclusion Looked-after children Children in the criminal justice system Drug and alcohol use
Family	Domestic violence Substance abuse in household Incarcerated household member Parental separation or divorce Mental illness in household Harsh or inconsistent parenting Poverty (including unemployment and low income) Poor and overcrowded housing
Some of these factors can result from other risk factors of vulnerability. For example, poor language and communication skills may lead to lower educational development.	

The definition of a vulnerable child:

Public Health England, for the purposes of this report, 'vulnerable children' are defined as any children at greater risk of experiencing physical or emotional harm and/ or experiencing poor outcomes because of one or more factors in their lives. (1)

The Department of Education define vulnerable children as **'those who have a social worker and those children and young people up to the age of 25 with education, health and care (EHC) plans.'** Children who have a social worker include those who have a child protection plan and who are looked after by the local authority. (2)

In the Early Years there are a wide range of factors which may cause a child or young person to be considered vulnerable. The Code of Practice does not just refer to children with identified Special Educational Needs or Disabilities.

- 1) No child left behind A public health informed approach to improving outcomes for vulnerable children: Public Health England; September 2020
- 2) Children of critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings: Department of Education; March 2021