Identifying Safeguarding Concerns: A Parent/Carer's Checklist

If you notice a combination of these signs, or a sudden, drastic change in your child's behaviour, it may indicate they are experiencing harm, abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

1. Emotional & Behavioural Indicators

- **Drastic Mood Shifts:** Sudden, unexplained bouts of extreme anxiety, panic attacks, depression, or uncharacteristic aggression.
- **Regressive Behaviour:** Acting significantly younger than their age (e.g., bedwetting, thumb-sucking, extreme clinginess).
- **Withdrawal & Isolation:** Dropping long-term friendships suddenly, avoiding family interactions, and locking themselves in their room for extended periods.
- **Negative Self-Talk:** Expressions of worthlessness, self-loathing, or explicit comments about self-harm and suicide.

2. Physical & Neglect Indicators

- **Unexplained Injuries:** Bruises, cuts, burns, or grip marks. Pay attention to injuries in hidden places or defensive wounds on arms/hands.
- **Inappropriate Clothing:** Wearing long sleeves/trousers in hot weather (often used to hide self-harm or physical abuse).
- **Poor Hygiene & Health:** A sudden decline in personal cleanliness, unwashed clothes, or untreated medical/dental issues.
- **Sleep & Appetite Disruptions:** Severe insomnia, chronic nightmares, fear of the dark, sudden weight loss, or hoarding food.

3. Child Sexual & Criminal Exploitation (CSE/CCE) Red Flags

- **Unexplained Wealth:** Possession of new phones, expensive clothes, vapes, or large amounts of cash with no logical explanation.
- **The Older Friend:** Associating with significantly older individuals or groups who dictate where they go and what they do.
- **Inexplicable Absences:** Missing school, skipping extracurriculars, or staying out late/overnight without permission ("going missing").
- **Substance Misuse:** Regular intoxication, smelling of alcohol/cannabis, or finding drug paraphernalia (foil, small plastic bags, missing prescription medication).

4. Digital & Online Safeguarding Risks

- **Extreme Device Secrecy:** Angrily hiding screens when you walk in, using encrypted apps, having multiple social media profiles (fakes), or panic-buying VPNs.
- **Distress Post-Screen Time:** Appearing visibly shaken, angry, tearful, or hyper-vigilant immediately after using a phone, laptop, or gaming console (can indicate online grooming, cyberbullying, or sextortion).
- **Secretive Packages:** Receiving unexpected deliveries or post that they refuse to open in front of you.

How to Respond If You Are Worried

1. **Stay Calm and Non-Judgemental:** If your child does open up, react calmly. If you panic, shout, or judge, they may shut down to protect themselves or you.
2. **Document Everything:** Keep a private, dated log of changes in behaviour, unexplained injuries, or unusual comments. This data is invaluable for professionals.
3. **Do Not Investigate Alone:** If you suspect criminal activity, grooming, or abuse by another adult, do not confront the suspect yourself. This can put your child—and you—in direct danger and may compromise a police investigation.

5. Radicalisation & Extremist Ideology Red Flags

- **Sudden Ideological Obsession:** An abrupt, intense fixation on a specific political, religious, or conspiracy-based ideology to the exclusion of all other interests.
- **"Us vs. Them" Mentality:** Using increasingly intolerant, divisive, or hateful language towards specific groups of people (based on race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation).
- **Sanitising Violence:** Expressing justification for violence, extremism, or illegal acts in defence of a cause.
- **Secretive Online Networks:** Spending hours on alternative, unmonitored forums or hidden chat groups known for radical rhetoric.