

Safeguarding Team

No. 3 Child Sexual Abuse

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet), this can also include sexual exploitation. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Many victims of sexual abuse in the family will never tell – they may be worried about the impact telling will have on other family members, they may be fearful that they won't be believed, and they may also be worried about what will happen next if they ask for help. It is important to remember that it is not necessary to have a disclosure for professionals to consider the possibility that a child may have been sexually abused.

Signs, indicators and considerations

Possible signs and indicators that a child is experiencing sexual abuse could include:

- Avoiding or being frightened of a person they know
- Age-inappropriate sexual language or behaviours
- Nightmares, wetting, soiling, smearing
- Self-harm, substance misuse
- Changes in eating habits, mental health difficulties
- Changes in mood
- Bruising in non-accidental areas, bleeding, pains or soreness in their genital or anal area
- STD's
- Pregnancy

- Sofa surfing, missing episodes, becoming involved in low level crime
- Keeping secrets, unexplained gifts, money
- Low or dropping attendance
- Changes in presentation, personal hygiene
- Spending more time online, texting, gaming or using social media
- Being secretive about who they are talking to online or on their phone

It is always important to be professionally curious, all too often signs and indicators for sexual abuse can be attributed to other forms of child abuse so you may also want to consider:

- Family background – have there been concerns / questions about potential sexual abuse?
- Do not allow a child / adult's level of learning disability / difficulty to distract from a sexual abuse hypothesis – these children are often more vulnerable, especially physically/cognitively disabled children that require intimate care.
- Children may be sexually abused by adults and/or peers.
- Children who are identified as possible perpetrators should also be considered as victims.

You may receive a disclosure of historical familial abuse, if this is the case it is important to identify other children in the family as they, now, may be the victims.

What to do

The judgement about levels of intervention will as always be based on concerns about significant harm. However, there is no 'mild' or 'acceptable' level of sexual abuse that might make it manageable within early help or even universal services - nearly all sexual abuse referrals will require a social care led intervention.

A Front Door Request for Support will need to be made as a matter of urgency. Do not contact parents to gain consent, as this may alert a perpetrator, may lead to the contamination or destruction of evidence, or in the case of non-familial abuse, may lead parents to take

matters into their own hands. If unsure contact the Front Door consultation line.

No disclosure is necessary to raise a concern about potential sexual abuse.

There are several resources available to support your settings decision making and inform of next steps if you have concerns around sexual abuse. Resources identified here are not an exhaustive list and you should explore your LA safeguarding partnership website for further information.

Contacts

Devon Front Door: Consultation line - 01392 388 428

Main telephone including emergencies or Early Help - 0345 155 1071

E-mail mashsecure@devon.gov.uk

Request for Support Form - [DCC - Request for support \(outsystemsenterprise.com\)](#)

Children's Social Care Emergency Duty Team (out of hours) - 0345 600 0388

Police (non-emergency) - 101

Police (emergency) - 999

Resources

Devon & Cornwall SARC – Sexual Assault Referral Centre [Home - Devon & Cornwall SARC - NHS \(sarchelp.co.uk\)](#)

Brook Traffic Light Tool [CPD: Brook Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool \(RSE\) Course](#)

Lucy Faithful Foundation tool kit [ECSA Toolkit | Lucy Faithfull Foundation](#)

SWGfL Harmful Sexual Behaviour in schools resources <https://swgfl.org.uk/resources/harmful-sexual-behaviour-in-schools/>

NSPCC <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-abuse/>

Stop It Now – helpline and resources <https://www.stopitnow.org.uk/>

Further information

DSCP – Child Sexual exploitation [Child sexual exploitation \(CSE\) is happening here in Devon \(devonscp.org.uk\)](#)

OMG No.5 Sexting [SEXTING](#)

OMG No.14 Child on Child Abuse [CHILD ON CHILD ABUSE](#)

OMG No.17 Contextual Safeguarding [CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING](#)

CEOP Think you Know - [Sex and the Law CEOP](#)

NPCP National Police Chief's Council – information for schools [Sexual Offences - DCD Hub](#)