

Centre of
expertise
on child
sexual abuse

Starting out on the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway

A guide for local partnerships



December 2023

About the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre)

Our overall aim is to reduce the impact of child sexual abuse through improved prevention and better response, so that children can live free from the threat and harm of sexual abuse.

Who we are

We are a multi-disciplinary team, funded by the Home Office, hosted by Barnardo's and working closely with key partners from academic institutions, local authorities, health, education, police and the voluntary sector.

Our aims

Our aims are to:

- increase the priority given to child sexual abuse, by improving understanding of its scale and nature
- improve identification of and response to all children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse
- enable more effective disruption and prevention of child sexual abuse, through better understanding of sexually abusive behaviour/perpetration.

What we do

We seek to bring about these changes by:

- producing and sharing information about the scale and nature of, and response to, child sexual abuse
- addressing gaps in knowledge through sharing research and evidence
- providing training and support for professionals and researchers working in the field
- engaging with and influencing policy.

For more information on our work, please visit our website:
www.csacentre.org.uk

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Introduction

“It’s like having a really big stone wall that you’ve got to get through and, you’re all there with teaspoons and mini hammers. What the Response Pathway does is give you some pickaxes. It doesn’t minimize the task. It just appropriately tools you up to do it.” (Team manager, Lincolnshire Children’s Services)

Over the last two years, the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) has been developing and piloting the **Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway**, a dynamic and free-to-use resource for professionals working with children who may have been sexually abused or be at risk of sexual abuse (Note: In this document we use the word ‘child’ to mean anyone under the age of 18.)

The Response Pathway is designed to support professionals from a range of agencies and organisations – including children’s social care, education, health, police, wider criminal justice agencies and the voluntary sector – to identify and navigate the actions they can and should take in order to respond effectively when there are concerns of child sexual abuse.

The emphasis throughout is on providing a *multi-agency* response which meets the needs of the child and their family.

Piloting implementation of the Response Pathway by local partnerships

Since late 2022, three pilot areas – Barking and Dagenham, Bristol, and Lincolnshire – have begun implementing and using the Response Pathway across their multi-agency workforces.

During that time, we have been evaluating the ways in which these areas have commenced the implementation process. The information gathered has informed the further development of the Response Pathway; it has also identified key questions that other areas should ask themselves, and actions they should take, when preparing to implement the Response Pathway within their local partnership. The advice and support provided in this guide is informed by the pilot areas’ experiences.

You can find out how the three pilot areas were selected, and how we have evaluated their initial implementation of the Response Pathway, in Appendix 1.

Please note that implementation of the Response Pathway in the three pilot areas is ongoing; we will continue to evaluate how it is being used and capture feedback from professionals – across all partnership agencies – who use it in their work.

The most effective way to implement the Response Pathway is within a multi-agency setting. In this guide we use the term ‘local partnership’ to denote any of a variety of safeguarding partnership frameworks in place across England and Wales.

What is the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway?

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The Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway – available free of charge at www.csacentre.org.uk/response-pathway – is a dynamic online resource for all professionals working with children. It helps them to understand the steps they can take to protect and support children and their families in any situation where there are concerns of child sexual abuse, whether inside or outside the family environment, involving adults and/or other children, etc.

The Response Pathway sets out how to respond to concerns at key points of safeguarding and criminal justice processes, focusing the response on meeting the needs of children and their families throughout. It:

- combines research evidence with input from cross-agency practice leaders and consultation with experts by experience and victims and survivors, highlighting their voices throughout
- builds on legislation and statutory guidance, clearly outlining the steps to take and the actions required at key stages in the safeguarding and protection process
- provides access to resources, guidance and tools, all grounded in evidence and good practice, to further support professionals in their work.

The Response Pathway comprises three levels of information, shown overleaf.



Level 1: Pathway map

An interactive map (shown in Appendix 2) showing stages in the processes for safeguarding and supporting children where child sexual abuse is a concern.



Level 2: Practice guides

Specific guidance at each point on the Response Pathway, setting out considerations and actions to help professionals best meet the needs of the child and their family.



Level 3: Supporting resources

Additional guides, filling significant gaps in the support previously available to professionals responding to child sexual abuse concerns. To date these include:

Signs and Indicators: A Template for Identifying and Recording Concerns of Child Sexual Abuse

Communicating with Children: A Guide for Those Working with Children Who Have or May Have Been Sexually Abused

Supporting Parents and Carers: A Guide for Those Working with Families Affected by Child Sexual Abuse

Safety Planning in Education: A Guide for Professionals Supporting Children following Incidents of Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Managing Risk and Trauma after Online Sexual Offending: A Whole-family Safeguarding Guide

Sibling Sexual Behaviour: A Guide to Responding to Inappropriate, Problematic and Abusive Behaviour

Each of these resources is available in both English and Welsh.

Over time, we will also highlight selected resources published by other organisations.

Our document ***An Introduction to the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway*** provides more information, including on the Response Pathway's key principles, why it is needed, how it was developed, and its emphasis on recognising children's diversity and identifying each individual child's needs.

The Response Pathway is free to use, share and come back to. We encourage professionals to access the online resource and **feed back to us** on its effectiveness in practice.

Why implement the Response Pathway in your local partnership?

The Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway has been developed to strengthen local safeguarding partners' ability to identify child sexual abuse and to meet the needs of children and families, with a focus on supporting all partners to make child-focused decisions.

One in ten children in England and Wales will experience some form of child sexual abuse before the age of 16, yet most of this harm remains hidden. Surveys suggest that sexual abuse is just as common as other forms of childhood abuse, such as emotional abuse or neglect, but statutory services identify child sexual abuse as a factor in far fewer assessments of need and risk.

There is widespread recognition that the collective response of *all* agencies to preventing, identifying, disrupting and responding to child sexual abuse needs to be improved. Professionals working with children need a clear understanding of the specific actions and processes they must follow when they have concerns of child sexual abuse, so they can act to ensure the safety and wellbeing of every child.

By highlighting the voices of children and adults who have been sexually abused in childhood, the Response Pathway can help professionals to consider and determine what each individual child wants and needs, and to keep children's safety and wellbeing central to their response.

The Response Pathway is designed as a system-wide approach to support individual practice when working with children. It does not seek to promote additional work, but rather provides guidance to carry out the right work.

We recognise that the current professional climate is challenging, with funding cuts and staff shortages in partnership areas across England. **The Response Pathway is not a new process in response to concerns of child sexual abuse.** It is grounded in existing legislation, policies and procedures, and is designed to fit with and enhance the systems and services in which practitioners work.

The Response Pathway is designed to be flexible: there is no 'one size fits all' approach to implementing it, and agencies in your local partnership can work out how the implementation process will work for them.

Each of the three pilot areas took a different approach to implementing the Response Pathway.

- Bristol highlighted the importance of *creating conditions for change* and *understanding both the child's and the professional's journey* within the context of child sexual abuse.
- Barking and Dagenham emphasised *developing shared aims and outcomes, working closely with strategic leaders* and *taking the time to 'reflect, learn and adapt'* during the implementation process.
- Lincolnshire focused on *outlining the role of system and process review* and *identifying and training Response Pathway champions* across the partnership area.

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Before you implement the Response Pathway

If you're thinking of implementing the Response Pathway across your local partnership, the experiences of the pilot areas suggest that it's worth asking yourself the following questions.

4.1 Why do you want to implement the Response Pathway?

Strategic leads in the three pilot areas were asked what had prompted them to become involved in piloting the Response Pathway. A common theme was the opportunity to build on targeted work they had already undertaken to highlight gaps in their response to child sexual abuse and in their support for professionals, and the opportunity to put child sexual abuse 'front and centre' in their work.

"There's always been a strong desire to improve our practice around sexual abuse. [Our] Partnership has identified increasing vulnerability for children affected by child sexual abuse through COVID. We have seen a reduction in referrals for child sexual abuse across the partnership and believe this represents the impact of hidden harm. The partnership is keen to build on the success of [recent initiatives] through greater integration of statutory and non-statutory multi-agency safeguarding processes around child sexual abuse to increase workforce knowledge, consistency of response, and improve timeliness of outcomes for children." (Bristol)

"Child sexual abuse is one of the priorities of the Safeguarding Partnership and an area of work that we had identified as requiring focused improvement across our local partnership. We have a clear commitment to embracing new approaches to improve our response to child sexual abuse, [so] involvement in the testing and development of the Response Pathway would be perfectly timed and help to consolidate the work already under way." (Barking and Dagenham)

"We had all these pockets of work going on around the full spectrum of sexual harm and we felt it was a really opportune time for the whole partnership to come together and really bring that focus on child sexual abuse." (Lincolnshire)

4.2 Is this motivation shared across your partnership?

You'll need to ensure that both the vision and the 'implementation ownership' of the Response Pathway are shared across all partner agencies. Strategic leads in all three pilot areas described widespread support for the Response Pathway, and a clear intent to 'ensure multi-agency ownership of the implementation, enabling all partner agencies to both contribute to developments and to hold each other to account' (Barking and Dagenham), and it's important to maintain that support through communication and involvement with all partners at all points during the implementation process.

Recognising and acknowledging potential challenges like this will make it easier to address them before you begin implementation (see Chapter 5).

"It's important for senior managers to be 'on board' [with the Response Pathway] but also to make a difference on the ground." (Lincolnshire)

4.3 What do you know about current responses to child sexual abuse in your area?

“You need to understand the environment into which you are bringing change.”
(Bristol)

Before starting to plan how to implement the Response Pathway, ensure you have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the *current* response to child sexual abuse in your area. Findings from the implementation pilots highlight that the following actions are valuable:

- Find out what training, strategies and procedures around child sexual abuse are currently in place in your partnership’s different agencies.
- Review and/or audit the existing response to child sexual abuse across those agencies, to gather an accurate picture of what is currently working well and where there are gaps or inefficiencies in service provision. Work might include:
 - reviewing existing child sexual abuse resources, policies and procedures
 - analysing a sample of cases in which child sexual abuse is a factor, focusing on identification, response and ongoing support for the child/family.
- Think about the data on child sexual abuse that partnership agencies already collect, *and* additional data you might consider useful to analyse. This will provide a baseline against which you can assess the impact of implementing the Response Pathway; it will also support implementation by helping you identify issues to focus on. Information that can be used to support implementation includes:
 - numbers of referrals to children’s social care where child sexual abuse is a concern
 - numbers of children on child protection plans (or, in Wales, on the child protection register) under the category of child sexual abuse
 - numbers of children on child in need plans with sexual abuse as a factor
 - numbers of police reports involving child sexual abuse which progress to investigation.
- Scope out unmet training needs across your partnership area in relation to child sexual abuse, arising from the audit activity and a review of data collection and analysis.

4.4 Are you realistic about timescales?

Implementing the Response Pathway is a *process* rather than a discrete event. If everyone involved understands this, it will be easier to set expectations.

Findings from **joint targeted area inspections** (JTAs) and **evaluations of our own training courses** indicate that a large proportion of professionals who work with children have had limited training specifically around child sexual abuse, both pre-qualification and during their service, so they will need *time* and *support* to feel confident in doing what the Response Pathway guides them to do.

5

Preparing to implement the Response Pathway

Once you feel that you are ready to begin implementing the Response Pathway in your partnership, there are steps you can take to ensure that the implementation proceeds smoothly and effectively. Evaluation of this **pre-implementation phase** in the three pilot areas highlighted its importance.

5.1 Establish strong commitment from all partnership agencies

From the outset, you'll need to have strategic buy-in from *all agencies* across the partnership, including education, health and police. A clear commitment to implementing the Response Pathway, both within each agency but also across the multi-agency network, is required.

Each agency needs to be clear about how the Response Pathway is relevant to its frontline professionals, in relation to enhancing their ability to safeguard and support children where there are concerns about sexual abuse.

"We have found from other innovations that we need to engage partnerships at an early stage in the adoption of new system change and innovation so that there is early buy-in and the opportunities for others to contribute to solution building." (Bristol)

"[The Response Pathway work] absolutely sits within the partnership and I think that's a massive strength. The partners are all on board and have committed a lot of time and thinking space to the impacts that [the Response Pathway] will have on their individual agencies." (Lincolnshire)

5.2 Ensure clear leadership

The implementation pilots revealed that it's not necessary for anyone to lead the process as *their main job*: in fact, only one of the pilot areas sought to recruit a Response Pathway coordinator. However, it is vital to have someone clearly driving the implementation process forward, organising meetings and making sure the work stays on track. This person needs to be known and well-embedded/connected across the partnership.

"When you've got those key strategic leaders that are supportive then the machinery works properly." (Lincolnshire)

"It's important that the people leading the implementation take the time to get their heads around resourcing, what needs to happen and then map it against your local procedures." (Lincolnshire)

5.3 Recruit a broad and representative steering group

This is an integral aspect of preparations to implement the Response Pathway, and it's essential that all partnership agencies are represented on the board or group overseeing implementation. We also recommend that you have representation from voluntary-sector organisations and experts by experience, if possible. We also suggest that steering group members have previous experience of change management or involvement in some form of change activity.

The governance frameworks driving forward implementation of the Response Pathway vary across the three pilot areas.

- In Barking and Dagenham, implementation is led by a group of strategic senior managers within the local authority, who report to a child sexual abuse safeguarding partnership sub-group containing representatives at senior level from children’s social care; health; child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), education, police, and the voluntary sector.
- Lincolnshire set up a task-specific steering group with an independent chair and representation from all statutory safeguarding partners as well as other partner agencies including the Office of the Police Crime Commissioner and the area’s sexual assault referral centre (SARC).
- Bristol established a working group which brings together members of the children’s safeguarding group and Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership’s sexual violence steering group.

“[Establishing the steering group] has really assisted us; it’s brought massive expertise, enthusiasm, excitement and conversations for people which I think is great.” (Bristol)

5.4 Undertake a Theory of Change process, with involvement from across the partnership

We recommend that any partnership area interested in implementing the Response Pathway undertakes a Theory of Change – a process through which a project team comes together to identify shared strategic aims (key areas of change in relation to the response to child sexual abuse), intended outcomes from implementing the Response Pathway, and activities to undertake as part of achieving those aims and outcomes.

Our video presentation [***An Introduction to Theory of Change***](#) contains advice on undertaking this process effectively. Additionally, tools and guides for creating a Theory of Change are available from both the [**National Council for Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\)**](#) and [**New Philanthropy Capital \(NPC\)**](#).

Table 1 provides examples of strategic aims and intended outcomes, taken from the Theory of Change documents developed in the three pilot areas. Note, however, that the aims, outcomes and activities that you develop will be specific to your partnership area.

Table 1. Example strategic aims and intended outcomes from implementing the Response Pathway

Strategic aims	Intended outcomes
Establish a workforce with appropriate knowledge, skills and confidence to respond to child sexual abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff are more able to recognise the potential signs and indicators of child sexual abuse • Staff are more confident to ask or talk to children and parents about child sexual abuse
Strengthen the multi-agency response to child sexual abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff know who to contact in different agencies • Staff are more aware of the need to share information and data with other agencies

“We found the theory of change really helpful for framing our strategic approach. The quality of the conversations was helpful; it was less about the final product, although that’s given us some direction and support, but it was really about getting people in the room, understanding the concerns, feeling like we had a shared narrative that was really positive.” (Bristol)

5.5 Engage frontline staff in the implementation process

All frontline professionals need to be aware of the Response Pathway as soon as its implementation begins, so all partners need to agree in advance when and how they will engage their staff in the implementation process. The following narratives provide insight from the pilot areas into the emphasis placed on engaging frontline professionals and the ways in which the Response Pathway was promoted to them.

“We attended team meetings and service meetings. We also have child sexual abuse bulletins that are distributed to children’s social care, health, police, CAMHS, Designated Safeguarding Leads across the partnership. [The Response Pathway is on the agenda] within management forums and it forms part of discussions with new starters via their induction.” (Barking and Dagenham)

“We started with small sector-specific groups, introducing the ideas of the Response Pathway and resources, and engaging them in conversations about what their challenges are. We undertook reflective learning audits with practitioners. We also started to provide updates to the partnership through our newsletters and staffing briefings, inviting them to be part of the work. We then began doing webinars and short inputs at whole staff events and partnership forums, to begin to build the awareness and thinking about child sexual abuse.” (Bristol)

“The first message to staff is important, isn’t it? You only get that first chance to promote and celebrate something that we see has got so much potential to add value to the practice within Lincolnshire. You can have everything in place at the top, but it’s how it’s perceived by frontline practitioners. We know we’ve got really stretched, hard-working practitioners across all agencies, dealing with some really complex situations trying to safeguard the children, typically, around child sexual abuse. We don’t want any resource or any pathway that is launched to be seen as something additional that’s going to add burden.” (Lincolnshire)

5.6 Provide training around child sexual abuse across all agencies in the partnership

If professionals receive training around child sexual abuse – in all its forms and contexts – they will enhance their knowledge and understanding of the abuse and how to respond to it. As part of the implementation pilots, the CSA Centre offered each of the three pilot areas:

- our one-day multi-agency training on intra-familial child sexual abuse (one session for up to 50 attendees)
- our two-hour introductory child sexual abuse training for frontline police officers (one session for up to 150 attendees)
- our one-day training for police officers in child sexual abuse/public protection units (PPU) (one session for up to 50 attendees)
- our one-day training for schools’ Designated Safeguarding Leads (one session for up to 25 attendees).

(Details of these training courses are available in our [training brochure](#).)

5.7 Become familiar with the Response Pathway and read the practice resources that sit alongside it

It's essential for both strategic leads and frontline professionals to become familiar with the Response Pathway – in its entirety, as well as the aspects most specific to individual areas of work – to understand how it works in a broader safeguarding context. During the pilot phase, members of the CSA Centre's Response Pathway implementation team led introductory learning sessions in each of the pilot areas. We will provide support and networking activities for partnership areas interested in implementing the Response Pathway in the future – see section 6.2.

Additionally, it's vital for strategic leads and frontline professionals to be clear on the distinctions between the Response Pathway and the practice resources that sit alongside it: the resources provide detailed advice on child-centred actions in specific situations, while the Response Pathway (i.e. the practice guides) situates that advice in practice and helps professionals to think how their response can best help the child in *any* situation where there are concerns about child sexual abuse.

5.8 Identify how to integrate the Response Pathway into existing child sexual abuse strategies and safeguarding policies/procedures

Before you begin to implement the Response Pathway, you'll need to think how you can integrate it across your partnership into existing policies and procedures relating to child sexual abuse. In each of the pilot areas, the steering group discussed ways to 'localise' the Response Pathway, acknowledging the need to align it with existing requirements.

For example, ask yourself how the Response Pathway will fit with local threshold documents – and what updates (if any) are required to other local partnership protocols, policies and procedures?

The pilot areas found that the learning sessions mentioned in section 5.7 above helped to address these concerns, as they led to a more comprehensive understanding of the Response Pathway's purpose and content.

“The Response Pathway gives us the opportunity to do better within our existing, national policies and procedures – strategy meetings and Section 47 timescales, for example. It can guide how national bits can be ‘done better’.”
(Lincolnshire)

At the start of the implementation pilots, all three pilot areas were either drafting a **child sexual abuse strategy** or planning to develop one; in each case, they considered the role of the Response Pathway in the context of this strategy, and aimed for development of the strategy to run concurrently with implementation of the Response Pathway. It was anticipated that this would enable them to *re-evaluate and understand the end-to-end experience of children and families who access services* (Bristol).

In October 2023, the London Safeguarding Children Partnership integrated the Response Pathway, along with six associated practice resources from the CSA Centre, into its **Safeguarding Children Procedures and Practice Guidance**. These procedures are well used and accessed by all safeguarding professionals in London.

5.9 Consider what successful implementation might look like

Understanding how well the Response Pathway has been implemented in your area will be driven in large part by the strategic aims, intended outcomes and proposed activities identified during your Theory of Change process (see section 5.4). Revisiting these aims, outcomes and activities will help you to better understand the progress you have made.

Questions to consider as you look to assess implementation of the Response Pathway might include:

- How will Response Pathway usage be monitored and quality-assured?
- How will you measure success, i.e. how will you know you've implemented the Response Pathway?
- How will you know what difference the Response Pathway has made to practice?

In Table 2, we revisit the strategic aims and intended outcomes outlined in Table 1, highlighting ways in which you can begin to measure success or capture signs of early impact in core areas. Note: these are just a few examples of the types of evidence you may want to capture.

Table 2. Measuring the success of your Response Pathway implementation

Strategic aims	Intended outcomes	How will you measure achievement of outcomes?
Have a workforce with appropriate knowledge, skills and confidence	<p>Staff are more able to recognise the potential signs and indicators of child sexual abuse</p> <p>Staff are more able to ask/talk to children and parents about child sexual abuse</p>	<p>Increase in the number of contact and referral for child sexual abuse</p> <p>cases identified and responded to through existing criminal justice, child protection, child in need and early help processes</p>
Strengthen the multi-agency response to child sexual abuse	<p>Staff know who to contact in different agencies</p> <p>Staff are more aware of the need to share information with other agencies</p>	<p>Increase in the proportion of child protection plans which have child sexual abuse as a factor</p> <p>Increase in referrals to, for example, counselling services and paediatric sexual assault referral centre (P-SARC)</p>

Putting the Response Pathway into operation



It is clear from the implementation pilots that there is no one 'best' way to use the Response Pathway, and processes and practice for its use will look different in each partnership area.

However, there are several questions that all partners will need to consider, with the answers being specific to your partnership area.

6.1 What will early implementation look like in your area?

In the first phase of implementation, each pilot area held a series of learning sessions across partnership agencies, to raise awareness of the purpose of the Response Pathway and the practice resources that sit alongside it. This work culminated in 'launch events', hosted either in-person or mix of in-person/online, with invitations extended to representatives across the partnership. For example:

- In Barking and Dagenham, 82 people attended the launch, representing Children's Services, education, health, police and Barnardo's.
- Bristol's event hosted 150 attendees from education, acute hospitals, the area's sexual assault referral centre (SARC), child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), public health nursing, paediatricians, police, voluntary-sector groups, probation, early help and social care.
- Lincolnshire's event took place in person with approximately 100 attendees from across the whole partnership, including three statutory partners, commissioned services (including health, Victim Lincolnshire and Victim Support), voluntary-sector organisations and education. It's estimated that attendees represented 27 organisations, and 17 teams within children's services.

While there are commonalities in how pilot areas 'launched' the Response Pathway in their region, each is adopting different approaches to its implementation and use in practice.

Lincolnshire

"Supervision plays a vital role in implementing the Response Pathway. We have established practice clinics delivered by managers and set up reading days to go through [the Response Pathway and the accompanying resources]. A key question for us was, how do we create the time and space in social workers' heads to enact the pathway? Something has to change. We can create endless resources, but we need to make sure that professionals have a chance to think 'What does good look like?'"

Barking and Dagenham: Consultation clinics led by Child Sexual Abuse Practice Leads

Barking and Dagenham commissioned the CSA Centre to run our Child Sexual Abuse Practice Leads Programme for social workers in 2021, and 14 social workers attended the training across 10 weeks. In May 2023, Barking and Dagenham commissioned the Practice Leads Programme for a further six social workers, including the Service Manager coordinating the implementation of the Response Pathway. (You can find out more about the Child Sexual Abuse Practice Leads Programme in our [training brochure](#) and associated [evaluation reports](#).)

The Practice Leads network in the partnership area now runs 'consultation clinics' in which social workers can bring cases for discussion and advice.

“Child sexual abuse consultations have been taking place for approximately 18 months and, as these became more frequent, a monthly consultation clinic was formed in February 2022. The clinic meets on a monthly basis with referrals received from practitioners across children’s services. Currently, plans are being made to make the clinic a multi partnership forum, and it is anticipated that other agencies will become members such as police, CAMHS, health and education. One of the core functions of these clinics is to promote best practice and use of the Response Pathway, in accordance with the issues presenting.”
(Barking and Dagenham)

The clinics have also gathered information, which has helped steer social workers to the Response Pathway and its resources.

“Our Child Sexual Abuse Practice Leads have put together a list of questions commonly asked by the professionals who attend these clinics. These have been added to our resource hub that is now up and running and the Response Pathway is clearly signposted within that. It is also embedded in social care pages on our intranet.”

Bristol: Benchmarking around assessment practices

“The multi-agency group undertook initial audits of children known to services. This highlighted concerns that there were no shared assessment processes for children experiencing sexual abuse, meaning that there were duplicate referrals to the specialist services and a gap in a shared understanding of children’s needs and how this could be met in the system. In addition, children and families found themselves telling their stories repeatedly. We have begun a piece of system change, mapping the different entry points to services and assessments that are undertaken [so we can look] for commonalities and differences. We are working on establishing the information-sharing protocols and shared systems that will enable better integration of our statutory and specialist [voluntary-sector] services to reduce this duplication.”

6.2 Support and networking opportunities

If your partnership area is interested in implementing the Response Pathway, the CSA Centre is developing free activities – such as webinars and workshops – that will bring this guide to life and enable you to share learning with other areas going through the same process. We will publish details of these on our website.

Additional resources available free of charge on our website include:

- our 90-minute eLearning course on **Identifying and responding to intra-familial child sexual abuse**
- a suite of 12 **training videos** (each 4–6 minutes long) with advice on identifying concerns of child sexual abuse, responding to those concerns, and supporting the families involved
- our suite of **practice resources**, some of which are accompanied by a short introductory film; these resources are part of the Response Pathway, but can be read and used independently to help professionals in your partnership identify and respond effectively to child sexual abuse in a range of contexts
- summaries of **key messages from research** on a variety of topics including children’s harmful sexual behaviour, the impacts of child sexual abuse, identifying and responding to disclosures, and child sexual abuse in online contexts
- our series of reports on the **scale and nature of child sexual abuse**, and agencies’ response to it, including several downloadable infographics summarising key points.

You can also find details of our paid-for training opportunities in our **training brochure**.

Appendix 1. The implementation pilots

When developing the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway, the CSA Centre wanted to understand how it could most effectively fit into local areas existing arrangements. In May 2021 we first invited expressions of interest in piloting the Response Pathway, and received 11 expressions of interest from 14 local authorities across England. (In two instances, a number of local authorities submitted a joint expression of interest.)

The three pilot areas – Barking and Dagenham, Bristol, and Lincolnshire – were selected on the basis of:

- their geographic diversity from each other
- the nature of the partnership structure in each area (including appropriate levels of seniority at the strategic level) and links to other partnerships/associations (for example, with voluntary-sector organisations)
- effective mechanisms in each partnership for sharing learning from the implementation process.

The three areas represent a diverse mix in terms of the above criteria.

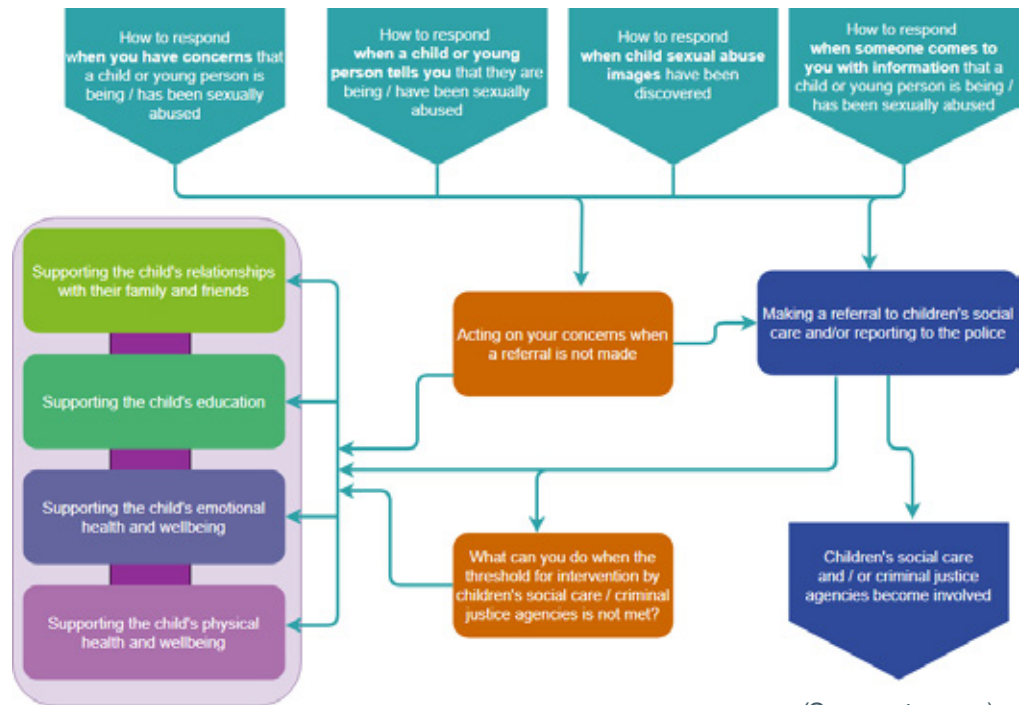
In addition, all three areas clearly linked their interest in the Response Pathway to their wider journey as a partnership tackling child sexual abuse.

The ongoing evaluation of the implementation pilots has incorporated a range of research methods. For each pilot area, we have:

- reviewed the area's expression of interest application
- facilitated in-depth, multi-agency Theory of Change sessions with stakeholders across the partnership
- undertaken a group interview with the partnership's strategic lead(s)
- attended monthly meetings with the partnership, and quarterly meetings with participants from all the pilot areas so they could discuss emerging issues and share learning with each other
- captured qualitative feedback in relation to the Response Pathway's content, accessibility and 'useability'.

Appendix 2. The Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway map

Part 1: Initial responses



(See next page.)



Part 2: When children's social care/criminal justice agencies are involved





The CSA Centre
Tanners Lane,
Barkingside,
Ilford, Essex,
IG6 1QG.

The photographs in this publication
were taken using actors and do not
depict actual situations.