



**Centre of  
expertise  
on child  
sexual abuse**

# **Introduction to the CSA Centre Practice Leads' Programme**

19 August 2025



# The CSA Centre

We are the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre). We want children to be able to live **free from the threat and harm of sexual abuse**.

Our aim is to reduce the impact of child sexual abuse through improved prevention and better response.

We are a **multi-disciplinary team** that works closely with key partners from academic institutions, local authorities, health, education, police and the voluntary sector.



# Working with people with lived experience

## We work with experts by experience in the following ways:

- Our Advisory Board includes experts by experience who represent organisations who support victims and survivors
- Experts by Experience consult, advise, review, support and train with us
- Audio and visual resources by victims and survivors are included in training





# Equality Act 2010

This training is underpinned by the **Equality Act 2010**

As an organisation, we recognise the importance of promoting equality of opportunity and addressing discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion, gender identity and sexual orientation.

This is vital in the context of understanding how discrimination impacts providing an effective response to child sexual abuse.





# What we will cover today



# An overview of the Practice Leads Programme



# The Child Sexual Abuse Practice Leads Programme

## We aim to:

Build confidence and competence of safeguarding professionals in managing child sexual abuse cases

## By developing the knowledge and skills of individual Practice Leads

Equipping you with **information** and **resources** to disseminate learning throughout your teams/organisation

Supporting organisations to develop internal cultures and systems of learning and development, linked to the child sexual abuse Centre, which supports ongoing best practice in child sexual abuse.

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## Feedback from previous pilots found:

Strong evidence of impact on knowledge, skills and confidence in identifying and responding to concerns of child sexual abuse



### Practice Leads were:

Taking a lead in tackling the fear and uncertainty around concerns of child sexual abuse.

Supporting and challenging colleagues in proactively addressing child sexual abuse concerns.

Disseminating learning across their Organisation.

Inspired / equipped to enquire about child sexual abuse and better at responding to disclosures.

Communicating more effectively across agencies.





# The timetable

The scale, nature  
and impact of child  
sexual abuse

Children's  
disclosures and the  
professional role

Offenders and  
offending

Working with non-  
abusing parents  
and carers

Females who  
sexually abuse

Children and young  
people who have  
displayed harmful  
sexual behaviours

Online offending

Child sexual abuse  
in the context of  
exploitation

Working with  
victims and  
survivors

Child wellbeing and  
the child protection  
process



# Reflective case discussion in cases of child sexual abuse

## What is it?

A focused and dedicated time to explore the emotional impact of the work

An opportunity to consider the assumptions and biases that may be driving practice and decision making

A facilitated learning experience which promotes critical reflection and analytical thinking

A safe space within which to step back from the situation and explore what may be happening here



# Organisation of reflective case discussions

Applying learning to practice through case discussion and thinking about the professional response.

- ✓ **Two groups** which will remain the same throughout the programme
- ✓ Two people (each session) to **bring anonymised child or family** for discussion (with genogram)
- ✓ 10 - 15 mins for **presenter to talk about the case** and the dilemma
- ✓ 35 – 45 mins for **colleagues to take turns to ask any clarifying questions** on information provided, and then questions to assist presenter in thinking about their case, with facilitator input
- ✓ 5 mins for **actions that presenter will take forward** from the discussion
- ✓ Time for **general discussion** on case issues that have arisen and **consideration of impact**



# Methods of learning

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Virtual platform – Teams or Zoom

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Powerpoint presentations

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Multimedia – videos, podcasts, audio etc.

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Small and large group discussions

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Reflective exercises

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Reflective case discussions

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Skills practice

---

External guest experts (for some sessions)

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Learning materials, references and resource lists



# What you can expect from us



## We will:



Deliver the programme according to the agreed timetable



Ensure content of the programme is based on current research, theory and evidence



Be open to constructively challenging any questionable attitudes and inappropriate behaviour



Aim to create a safe virtual space



Ensure content of the programme is accessible to all participants



Provide electronic copies of all course materials



Be available for communication with Practice Leads and Line Mangers throughout the programme



# What we need from you

## Practice Leads will need to:

Commit to attending the full programme

Engage fully in both the taught and reflective learning sessions:

- Bringing case material
- Engaging in course activities
- Applying learning to practice in between sessions
- Undertaking any suggested reading.

Complete the online evaluation surveys at the start and end of the programme.

## Supervisors/managers will need to:

Afford time for attendance

Allocate relevant cases/opportunities to their Practice Leads

Support the Practice Leads in their role of sharing their learning across their teams or organisation



# Confidentiality, accountability and safeguarding

Any case material presented or discussed in taught or reflective learning sessions must be **anonymised**, according to the commissioning agency's confidentiality and data protection arrangements.

Where cases are discussed during the programme, the child sexual abuse Centre will provide guidance where appropriate. However, responsibility for decision-making in all cases **remains with the commissioning organisation.**

Should any safeguarding issues arise during the programme, the course facilitator/s will raise these as soon as possible with the **nominated person within the commissioning agency.**

Information collected within evaluation surveys will be treated as **confidential.**

# Embedding the Programme





# Preparing for the programme



## Practice Leads:

What do you need from your line manager?

What do you need from your Senior Manager/organisation?

What do you see as the particular opportunities and challenges of the role?

## Line Managers:

How can you best support your Practice Lead?

What do you need from your Senior Manager/organisation?

What do you see as the particular opportunities and challenges of the role?



# Support during the programme

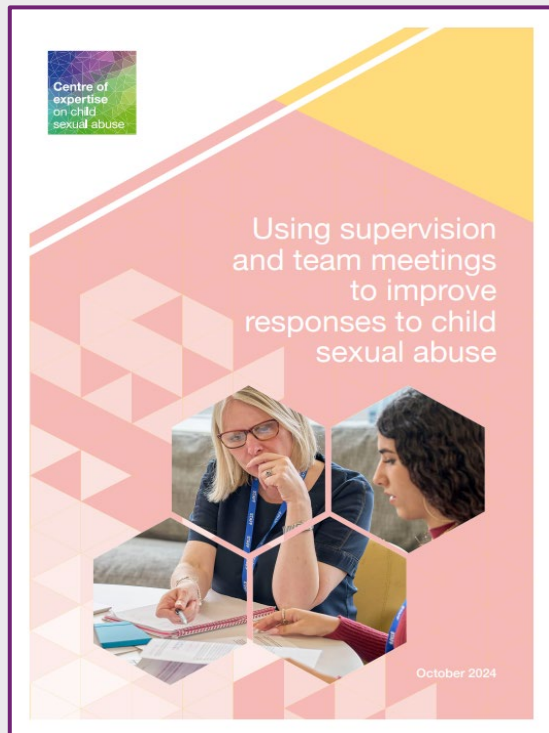
## We recommend:

- Be aware of the **emotional impact**
- Add a regular **supervision** agenda item
- Regular **check ins**
- **Allocate** relevant cases
- Prioritise **attendance**
- No other work on session days, **out of office** on
- Course facilitator **support**





## Resource to support practice



Our **Using supervision and team meetings to improve responses to child sexual abuse** guide helps professionals **start discussions** about child sexual abuse within their teams, **reflect on** the experiences of children and families they are working with, **explore** their team's and their own **welfare**, and consider how the evidence might inform and **develop their practice**.

Free to download:

<http://www.csacentre.org.uk/knowledge-in-practice/practice-improvement/>



# Sustaining the role

With strong senior management commitment to embedding the Practice Lead role, the effectiveness of the programme is highest and practice development more likely to be sustained.



Some of the ways to maximise this are as follows:

- Supporting the Practice Leads to continue to meet as a group after the end of the programme
- Offering opportunities within existing meetings, to share their learning and establish their role.
- Tell people within the organisation about the role.
- Using existing 'knowledge hubs' where resources can be shared across the organisation



# Break

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on child sexual abuse



# Hearing from the Practice Leads



# Introductions

**In pairs, discuss the following and then feedback to the larger group**

- Name and role
- What you want to get from the programme
- One word or phrase that sums up your personal response to the prospect of working with child sexual abuse – all feelings are allowed!
- Rating out of ten – how comfortable do you feel responding to this issue?





## Principles for the programme (or always)

**Suspend judgments, assumptions and certainties** – none of us knows it all, or what is right or wrong

**Exploring together** shines a light on what we do not yet know or see

**Speak one at a time** - and with intention

**Listen to each other carefully** - and with attention

**Listen for insights and deeper questions** – be willing to move away from the 'surface' of what you already know

**Engage fully with others** to bring what we do not yet know to our consciousness

**Link and connect ideas** - create the new, live into the future



# An introduction to the CSA Centre, the website and resources

# Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

Our aim is to reduce the impact of child sexual abuse through improved prevention and better response.

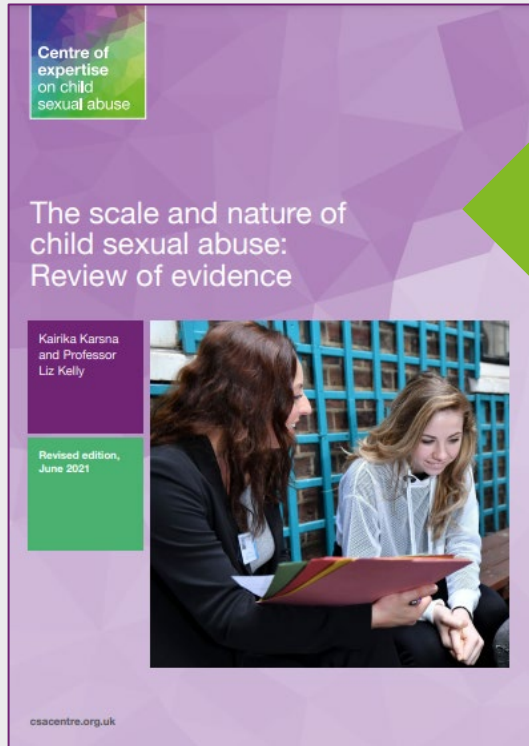


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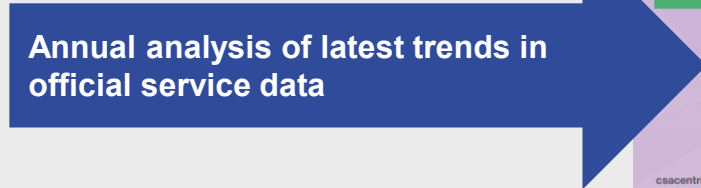
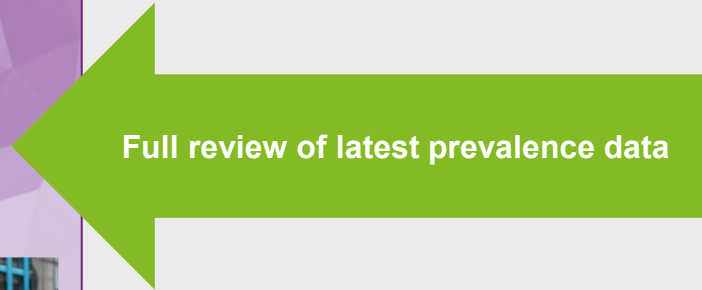




# Understanding the scale and nature of child sexual abuse in England and Wales



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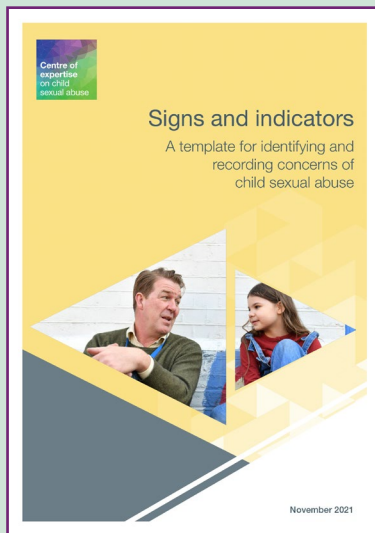


csacentre.org.uk

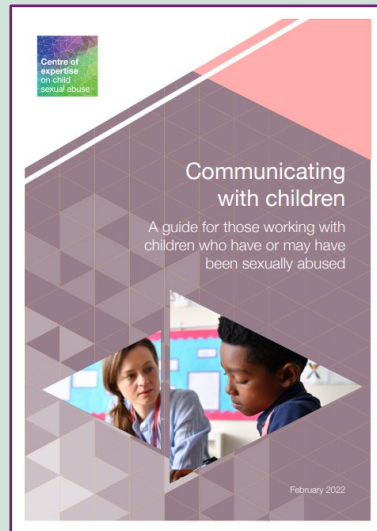


# Resources to support practice

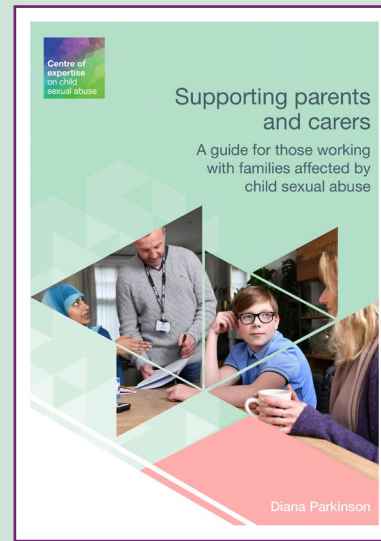
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A template for professionals to identify and record concerns of child sexual abuse

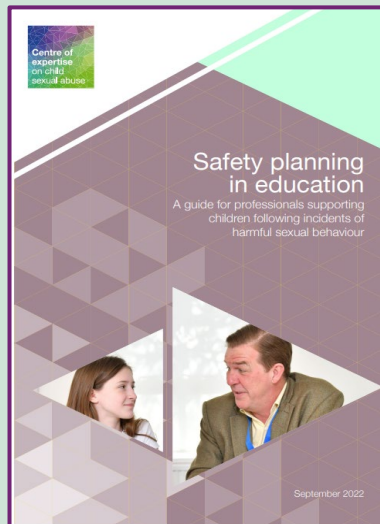


A guide for professionals working with children who have or may have been sexually abused

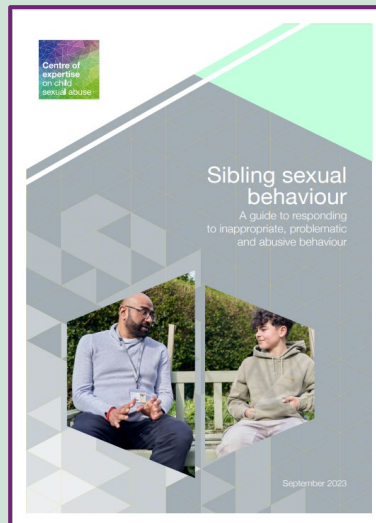


A guide for professionals working with families affected by child sexual abuse

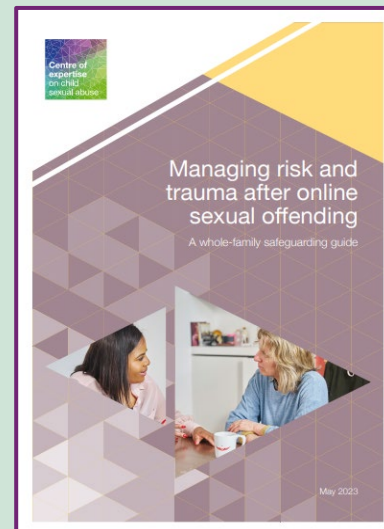
<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-resources/practice-resources/film-series/>



A guide for professionals supporting children following incidents of harmful sexual behaviour



A guide to responding to inappropriate, problematic and abusive behaviour



A guide to help professionals safeguard the whole family when a parent has accessed child sexual abuse material



# Key messages from research

## What are they?

- Succinct, relevant information for frontline practitioners and commissioners
- The most up-to-date research combined with guidance supporting confident provision of the best possible responses, in one accessible overview

## Topics include:

- Harmful sexual behaviour in online contexts
- Child sexual abuse by adults in online contexts
- The impacts of child sexual abuse
- Children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour

<http://www.csacentre.org.uk/resources/key-messages/>





## Free eLearning course:

### Identifying and responding to intra-familial child sexual abuse

This course is designed for **anyone working with children** to understand what intra-familial child sexual abuse is, provide guidance on how to identify concerns and build knowledge and confidence in how to respond to support both the children and their wider family.

For professionals at **all stages of their career**; for those without any training on child sexual abuse, or as a helpful refresher.

It is **completely free** and should take no more than **90 minutes** to complete.





# Sign up to our newsletter

- ✓ Latest research
- ✓ Practice guidance
- ✓ Comment
- ✓ News
- ✓ Ideas

<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/newsletter/>







Try it in action...



# Key principles and challenges in practice



## Looking after yourself

Sexual abuse can be difficult to think about and talk about. Thinking about it and talking about it will affect us all in **different ways**, at **different times**.

It is important that we...

- Be aware of the feelings and experiences of other delegates
- Be kind to ourselves (personally and professionally)
- Respect each other's learning journey



# Grounding exercise



5 things you can see

4 things you can feel

3 things you can hear

2 things you can smell

1 thing you can taste



*“I don’t know why it started and I don’t know why it stopped...I still don’t know really, no one ever spoke with me about it”.*

(Survivor, aged 41)





# Understanding the different contexts of offending

Child sexual abuse within  
the family environment

Child sexual abuse through  
attack by an unknown person

Child sexual abuse through  
trusted relationships outside  
the family environment

Child sexual abuse through  
a personal connection

Child sexual abuse through  
an intermediary

Child sexual abuse arranged  
and perpetrated for payment

Child sexual abuse through  
online interaction

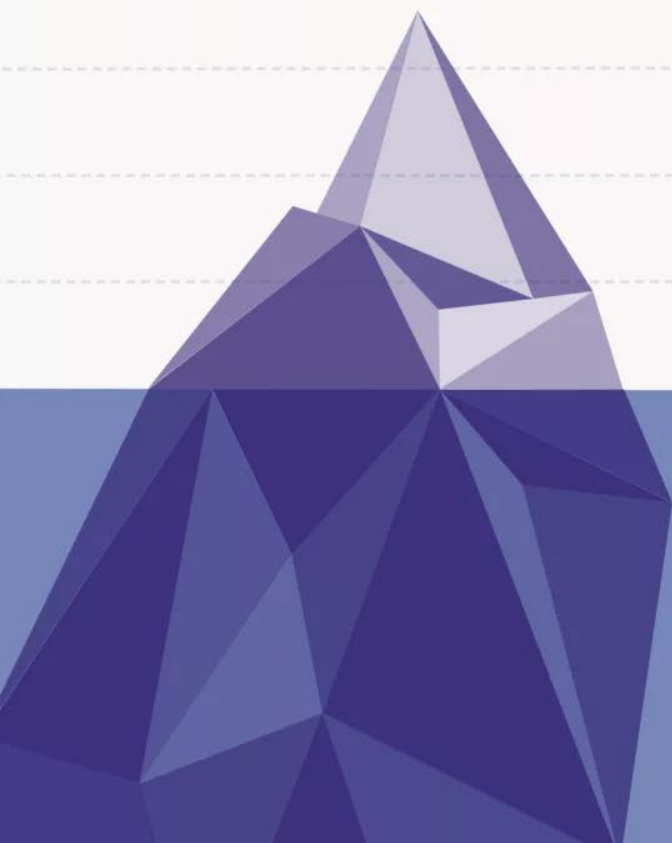
Child sexual abuse through  
groups and networks

Child sexual abuse through  
viewing, sharing or  
possessing images



# Far more children are sexually abused than services identify

Child sexual abuse in 2023/24: Trends in official data  
[csacentre.org.uk](https://csacentre.org.uk)



2,200 children on a child protection plan due to child sexual abuse (England)

10,500 children seen by sexual assault referral centres (England and Wales)

45,000 children assessed at risk of sexual abuse\* (England)

101,000 child sexual abuse offences recorded by the police (England and Wales)

500,000

children are estimated to be sexually abused every year\*\*

Sources: Home Office, Police recorded crime and outcomes, 2023/24; Department for Education, Characteristics of Children in Need, 2023/24; NHS England 2025. \*Includes assessments recording concerns of child sexual abuse and exploitation. \*\* Estimate calculated using single-year prevalence estimated by age group (Radford et al. 2011, Childhood abuse and neglect in the UK today) and the Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates, 2023. Please note: numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred/thousand.



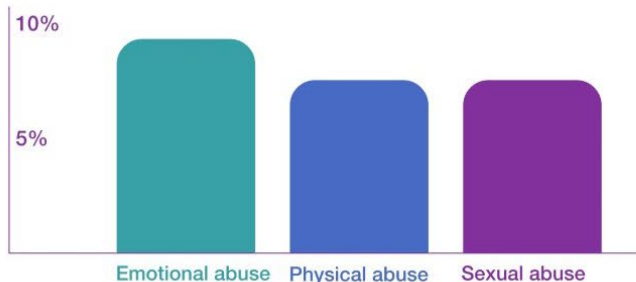


# Sexual abuse is just as common as other forms of childhood abuse

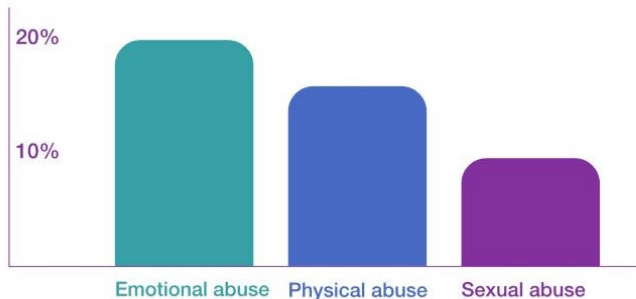
Child sexual abuse in 2023/24: Trends in official data  
csacentre.org.uk

## But concerns of sexual abuse are far less likely to be identified and named

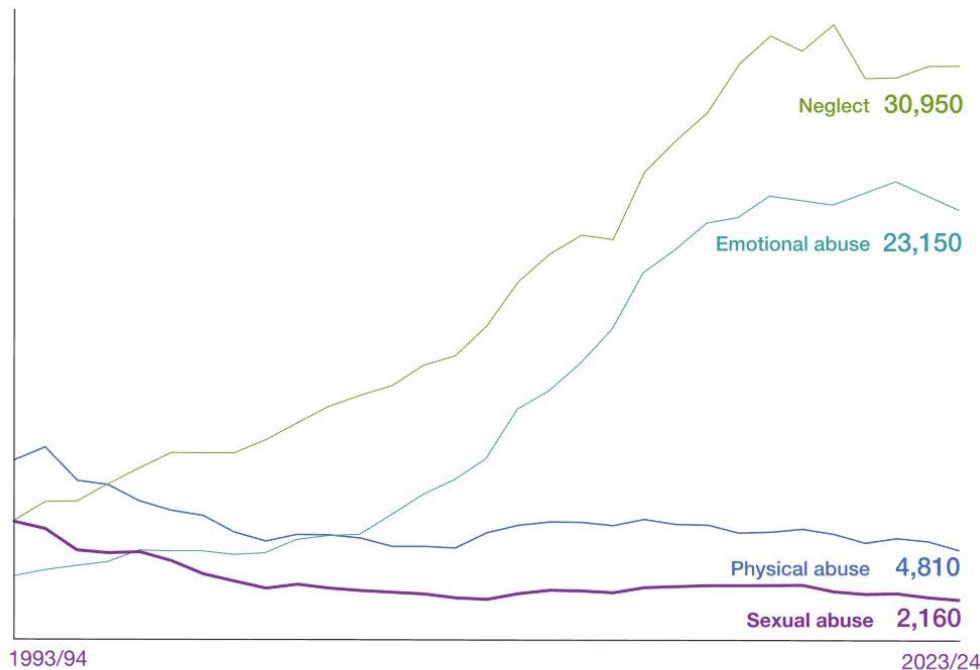
Similar levels of child abuse are identified in surveys



...but lower levels of child sexual abuse are identified in child in need assessments



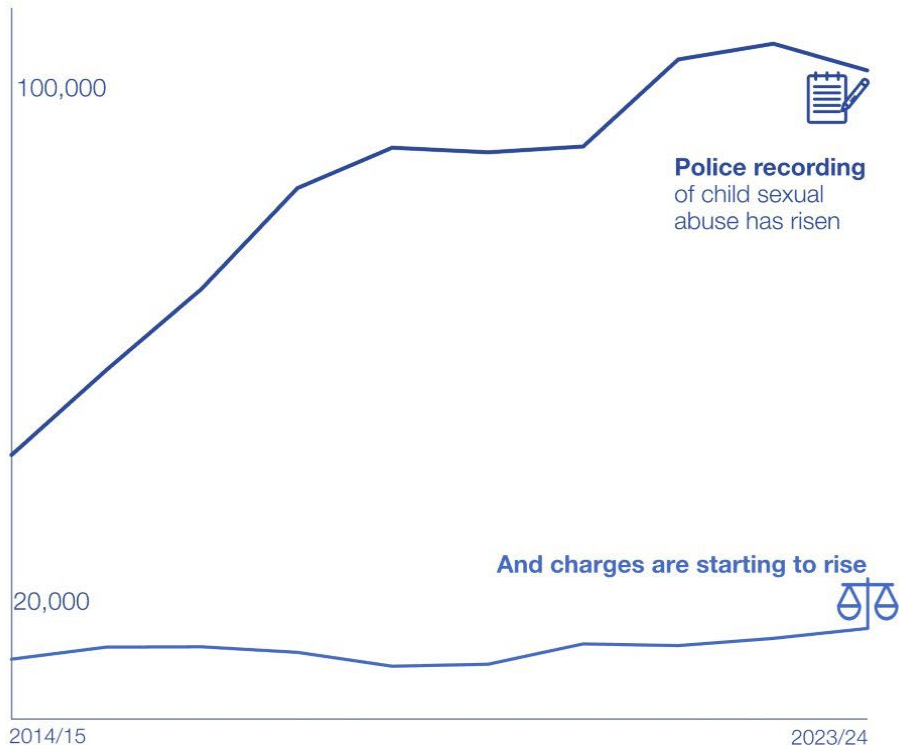
Number of child protection plans by form of abuse





# More recording of child sexual abuse but it takes longer to complete at court

Child sexual abuse in 2023/24: Trends in official data  
csacentre.org.uk<sup>42</sup>



Average time from recording to charge



Average time from charge to completion at court



**The time taken for a case to progress from charge to completion has increased by 29% while time from recording to charge has fallen slightly.**

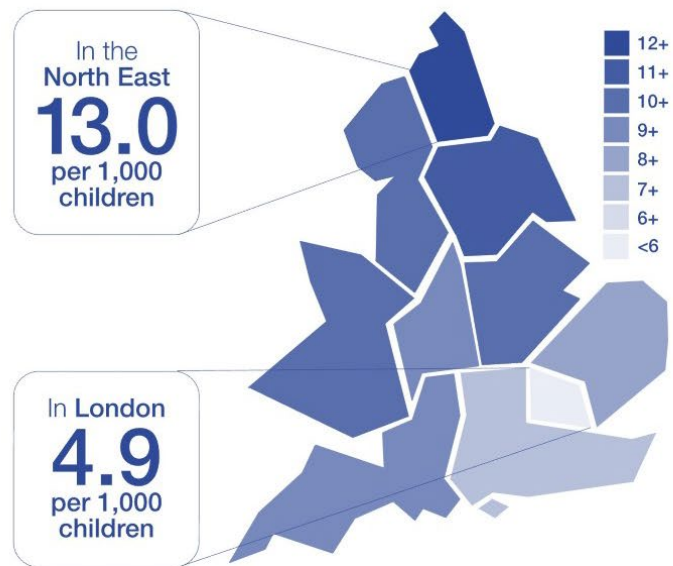


# Where children live matters

Child sexual abuse in 2023/24: Trends in official data  
csacentre.org.uk

Child sexual abuse is prevalent across England and Wales but where children live impacts whether that abuse is identified.

Number of child sexual abuse offences recorded by police



Children identified at risk of child sexual abuse in local authority assessments



These maps show the **average rates** within each region; there are wide differences in rates across regions and between individual police forces/local authorities.



# The Data Insights Hub

## Local and national data on child sexual abuse in England & Wales

The Data Insights Hub is our **new interactive online dashboard** designed to enable professionals, commissioners and researchers to find, understand and use official data on child sexual abuse.

Using interactive maps and charts, the Data Insights Hub displays official data from local authorities and police forces, alongside up-to-date estimates on the scale of child sexual abuse, **all in one place**.







# Our response has always been reactive

## A pendulum swinging between media panics



# THE PAEDO IS LANDING



# 50

**MORE MONSTERS  
TOOK PART IN  
CHILD SEX RING**

- DOZENS ARE STILL WALKING FREE
- EVIL GANG TOOK AWAY MY DIGNITY
- WE'RE SORRY FOR NOT ACTING SOONER, SAY COPS AND COUNCIL
- AND HOW THE FAR RIGHT ALMOST WRECKED THE TRIAL

**SPECIAL REPORTS: PAGES 4,5,6 & 7**

# PERV HUNT .COM

Website names  
wanted paedos

**28 MONTHS**

# SICKO JAILED

**MAN SENTENCED FOR SEXUAL ABUSE**

STRIKING GREAT LOSS FROM YOUR PHONE BY UP TO 50%



# Assumptions that follow the stereotypes...

- That we can tell by looking
- That men who are ‘**good with children**’ do not sexually abuse them
- That if children say they **want to see** their abusive parent, they cannot be abusing them
- That if children don’t **appear distressed** when making a disclosure, then it must be untrue



# What are the obstacles in practice?

## In small groups/group discussion

(10 minutes)

- Individually
- Organisationally
- Systemically

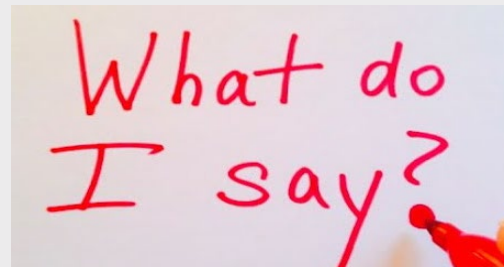
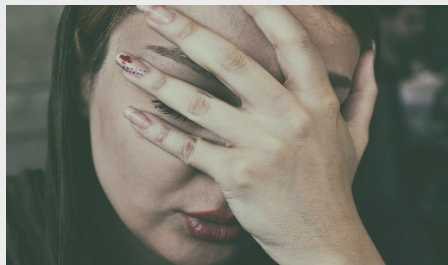
**Please nominate a spokesperson to take notes.**







# The obstacle of fear



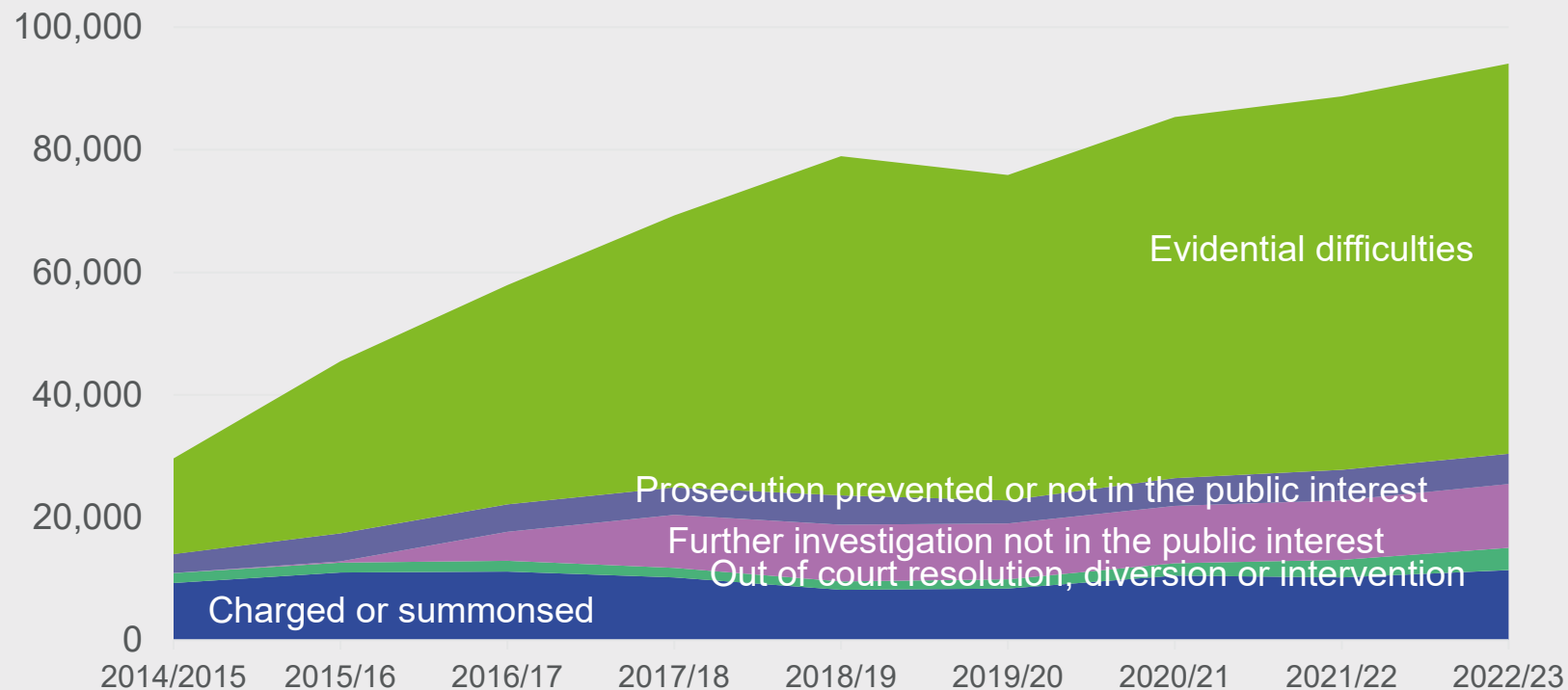
# It can feel like a bit of a minefield

Asking questions...



# Investigation outcomes of child sexual abuse offences

## England and Wales, 2022/23





# The Burden of Proof

## Beyond Reasonable Doubt



## Balance of Probabilities





## The implications of a 'no further action' decision

An NFA decision from Police/CPS has undue influence over the remainder of the system's response to children.

- *The police have taken NFA so there's nothing we can do*
- *There's no evidence the child has been abused*
- *The child made must have made this up*
- *I can't say I believe the child if there is no evidence for it*
- *There is no evidence this child was previously abused*
- *We can't refer to specialist help as there's no evidence it happened*
- *The family won't work with us now, and we don't have the evidence to make them*



## No Further Action

### What does it mean?

No further action is when the **Police/CPS** make a decision not to charge someone with an offence. This may be because there is not enough evidence or it is not in the public interest.



It does **not** mean the child has not been believed or listened to

It does **not** mean that agencies walk away because there is nothing that can be done

It is **not** the time to decide what support can be given. That should already be happening.

It does **not** mean that an investigation cannot be restarted should further evidence come to light

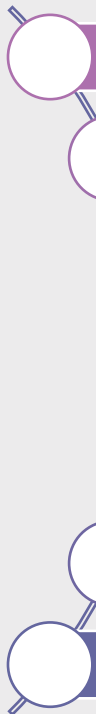
## Recommendation 3: Enquiries and Investigations

- Safeguarding partners to audit and review local guidance and practice so that a clear distinction is made between thresholds about significant harm to a child and those influencing criminal investigations.
- Safeguarding decisions must be based on **all indicators of sexual abuse** and should not rely solely on verbal statements from children.
- At the conclusion of section 47 enquiries and police investigations, there is a multi-agency discussion to consider risk to the children and how they will be protected and supported.
- The term 'no further action' should not be used in these circumstances as it is too often understood to mean the abuse did not happen. The term 'no further police action at this time' is more appropriate. There should be a clear record of why a criminal investigation has been closed and that this information has been shared with other relevant agencies.

“I wanted them all to notice”: Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment (Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2024)

# Key principles

To summarise

- 
- 1. Secrecy and silence are the best friends of sexual abuse
  - 2. Sexual abuse takes place in many different and overlapping contexts
  - 3. The majority of sexual abuse goes undetected
  - 4. Not 'what if I'm wrong?' but 'what if I'm right?'
  - 5. 'No further action' does not mean the child has not been abused
  - 6. Evidence is broader than verbal disclosure
  - 7. We all have a role to play





# The Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway

An interactive online resource to guide professionals through how they can protect and support children and their families when there are concerns of sexual abuse.

- The Response Pathway sets out **how to respond to concerns of child sexual abuse at key points**: from first concerns and early help safeguarding through to child protection and criminal justice. Throughout, the Response Pathway focuses on meeting the needs of children and their families.
- It is designed to **empower professionals** to understand the role they, and their colleagues, can play to best protect and support children. It doesn't just tell professionals what to do, **it helps them to understand how to do it**.



<http://www.csacentre.org.uk/response-pathway>



# Break

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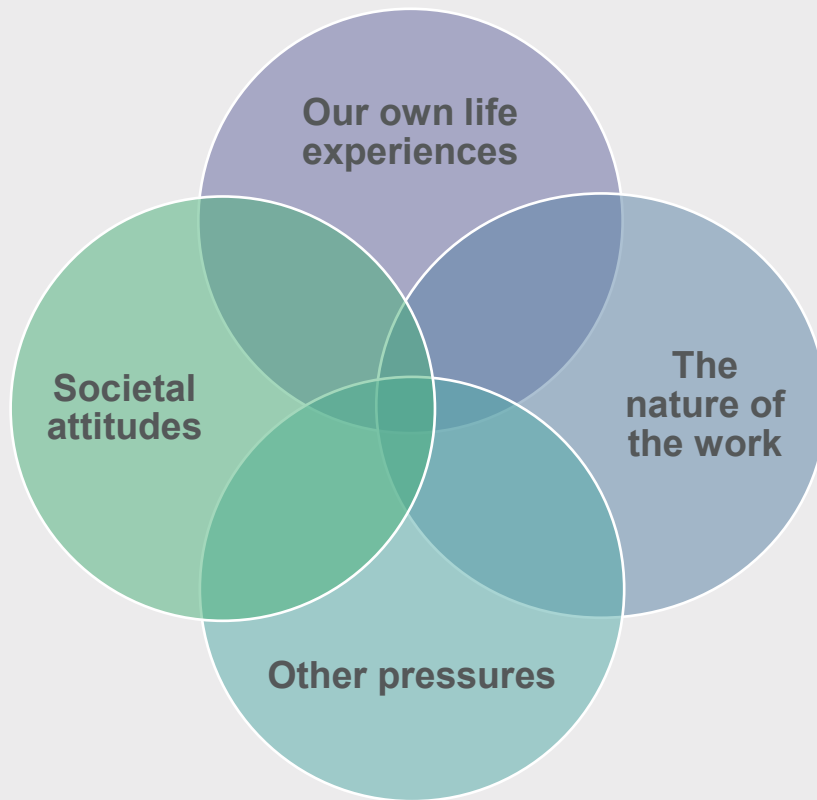


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# Impact of this work and self-care

# Thinking about the impact on us

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# The impact of the work

## How might this work impact us?

How do you feel about working with:

- Children who have been, or are being, sexually abused?
- Adults who have sexually abused children?
- Children who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour?
- Non-abusing parents and carers?

## How do you think this might impact you personally?





# The impact on you

Supporting family members to cope with and recover from the impact of sexual abuse can have a psychological and emotional impact on you as a professional

The effects can include:

- Feeling overprotective towards children in your life
- Having trouble sleeping
- Feeling angry, frustrated or disillusioned
- Finding it difficult to empathise.

**Maintaining your energy levels, and your feelings of self-worth and self-esteem, is essential to ensure that you can work effectively and preserve your own emotional wellbeing**



# Community reactions to our work

Reluctance to discuss work with family – concerns about confidentiality, tiredness, fear of contaminating them in some way

Not wanting to tell people what you do: 'conversation killer'

Others telling you about their experiences

Accusations that too little provided for victims

Accusations of being a 'protective advocate' of those who abuse children

Alienation



# Managing impact

Group discussion



# What can you do?

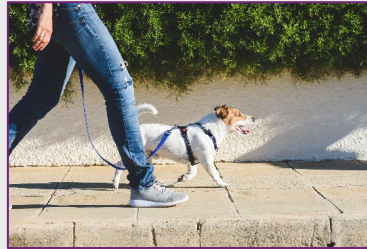
- Acknowledge impact
- Make a commitment to talk about the impact of the work
- Express distress and negative emotions
- Separate out issues of competence from aspects of impact
- Respond proactively
- Manage your energy: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual
- Meaning: at the start and throughout your career (explore in supervision regularly)
- Know your strengths and vulnerabilities





# Taking care of yourself

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## If you are affected by anything discussed today...



### **The Survivors Trust - Helpline: 08088 010 818**

Find help, support and advice in your area:

<https://www.thesurvivorstrust.org/>



### **Rape Crisis helpline 0808 500 2222 (24 hours)**

[www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)



### **National Association for People Abused in Childhood 0808 801 0331**

<https://napac.org.uk/>



### **SurvivorsUK**

Online help for male survivors of sexual abuse and rape.

<https://www.survivorsuk.org/>

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## Find a support service



Being able to access support, as a child, young person or adult, is crucial to mitigating the impacts of child sexual abuse.

To help make this easier, the CSA Centre has created a directory containing **over 350 child sexual abuse support services in England and Wales.**

The **accessible, searchable Support Services Directory** is a simple way for victims and survivors, their families, or professionals, to find services that can help.

Find support services and get help today.

[csacentre.org.uk/get-support/](https://csacentre.org.uk/get-support/)

## Stop It Now! helpline



If you are worried about your own thoughts or behaviours or are worried about the behaviours of someone around you, you can contact the **Stop It Now! helpline** for **free, confidential advice:**

**0808 1000 900**



# Any questions?

For more information please contact:

**[info@csacentre.org.uk](mailto:info@csacentre.org.uk)**



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on child sexual abuse**

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**[childsexualabusecentre.org.uk](http://childsexualabusecentre.org.uk)**

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