



# Implementing the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway

A guide for local safeguarding partnerships and  
regional safeguarding boards

Updated May 2026

## 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](http://www.csacentre.org.uk)

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## Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Evaluating the implementation of the Response Pathway in local safeguarding partnerships	5
<b>2. What is the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Why implement the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway in your local partnership?</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1 Need for clearer guidance and support	8
3.2 How the Response Pathway can help you	9
<b>4. Using the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway in practice</b>	<b>10</b>
4.1 Impact on strategic thinking and planning	10
4.2 Structuring supervision and facilitating reflection spaces	11
<b>5. Before you implement the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway</b>	<b>13</b>
5.1 Why do you want to implement the Response Pathway?	13
5.2 What do you know about current responses to child sexual abuse in your area?	14
<b>6. Preparing to implement the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway</b>	<b>16</b>
6.1 Establish strong commitment from all partnership agencies	16
6.2 Recruit a broad and representative steering group	17
6.3 Undertake a Theory of Change process, with involvement from across the partnership	17
6.4 Engage frontline staff in the implementation process	19
6.5 Provide multi-agency training and development on child sexual abuse and the Response Pathway	19
6.6 Identify how to integrate the Response Pathway into existing child sexual abuse strategies and safeguarding policies/procedures	20
6.7 Consider what successful implementation might look like	20
<b>Appendix 1. Templates and links to support implementation of the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Appendix 2. The CSA Centre’s Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendix 3:  Checklist for implementing the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway</b>	<b>25</b>

## 1. 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 minimise the task. It just appropriately tools you up to do it.”*  
(Interview: Lincolnshire)

*“Practitioners genuinely want to know what to do. In terms of the Response Pathway, I think people value guidance; they like to know the steps, the stages. It makes people feel more confident because they’ve got that ... when they do A, then B happens then C happens ...”* (Interview: Isle of Wight and Hampshire Safeguarding Children Partnerships)

The Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway (Response Pathway) is an interactive, step-by-step tool designed to support all practitioners, managers and leaders working with children and families from a range of agencies and organisations – including children’s social care; education, health, police, and wider criminal justice agencies; and the community and voluntary sector – to identify and navigate the actions they can and should take in order to respond effectively when there are concerns about child sexual abuse.

The emphasis throughout is on providing a *multi-agency* response which meets the needs of the child and their family as all agencies are responsible for improving the response to child sexual abuse.

The Response Pathway supports the development of broader strategies to identify and respond to child sexual abuse. Other CSA Centre resources, including [Developing your Strategic Response to Child Sexual Abuse](#) and [Support Matters: Briefing for policymakers, funders and commissioners](#) will be useful for its implementation.

This guide aims to support leaders to create the system conditions, leadership, governance, accountability and workforce capability required to implement the Response Pathway in a strategic, evidence-informed, and sustainable way. It includes links to several helpful resources to support implementation (Appendix 1).

The guide draws on learning from the pilot implementation of the Response Pathway across a range of local safeguarding contexts. Evaluation of CSA Centre-supported implementation activities generated learning on how the Response Pathway is being used in practice, including its impact on strategic leadership, service management, and frontline responses to child sexual abuse. Evaluation findings are incorporated throughout the guide.

## 1.1 Evaluating the implementation of the Response Pathway in local safeguarding partnerships

In 2022, the CSA Centre selected three local areas – the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, Bristol and Lincolnshire – to pilot the Response Pathway across a multi-agency workforce, with sustained support from the CSA Centre. Following this initial pilot, between 2024 and 2025 the CSA Centre worked in partnership with two regions in England – the North West and the West Midlands – to support regional implementation of the Response Pathway.

Building on learning from the initial pilot phase, this work involved supporting leaders within multi-agency safeguarding partnerships in the two regions to clarify local priorities for improving responses to child sexual abuse, and to translate these into clear, shared regional strategies. The CSA Centre also supported partners to strengthen and make better use of data, raise awareness of the Response Pathway through targeted training and webinars, and begin to establish approaches to measuring impact over time.

During this period, we also engaged with other local safeguarding partnerships, including Isle of Wight and Hampshire, which had already used earlier versions of this guidance to implement the Response Pathway; we have drawn on their insights to understand what supports effective implementation in different contexts.

The most effective way to implement the Response Pathway is across multi-agency systems. Throughout this guide we use the term 'local partnership' to describe the safeguarding partnership arrangements that bring these agencies together, including within regional structures across England and Wales.

## 2. What is the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway?

[The Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway](#) is a free, online resource which can be integrated into local safeguarding websites, policy and guidance. It is designed to support all practitioners, managers and leaders working with children to identify and respond to child sexual abuse. It will help them to understand the steps they can take to protect and support children and their families in any situation where there are concerns about child sexual abuse, whether inside or outside the family environment, and which involve harm by adults and/or other children.

- The Response Pathway offers practical advice on how to respond at key points from first concerns and early help safeguarding through to child protection and both criminal and family justice responses. Throughout, it focuses on meeting the needs of children and their families: it combines research evidence with input from cross-agency practice leaders and consultation with victims and survivors, highlighting their voices.
- It identifies relevant legislation and statutory guidance, clearly outlining the steps to take and the actions required at key stages in the safeguarding and protection process.
- It provides access to resources, guidance and tools, all grounded in evidence and good practice, to further support practitioners in their work.

Our document, [An Introduction to the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway](#), provides more information 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 practitioners, managers and leaders to access the online resource, and we welcome feedback on its accessibility, how it is being used in practice, and the impact it has on partnership working – at strategic, manager and frontline levels. Please let us know by completing our [online feedback survey](#).

The Response Pathway comprises three levels of information:

### Level 1: Entry page

Multiple routes into the Response Pathway, including:

- an interactive map of the whole multi-agency pathway (shown in Appendix 2)
- links to guidance on how to respond to concerns about a child
- options to view sections of the Response Pathway related to children's social care, criminal justice and family law
- a search function



### Level 2: Response Pathway guidance

Specific information and guidance at each point on the Response Pathway, setting out considerations and actions to help practitioners best meet the needs of the child and their family. Guidance at each decision point is available in summary form or as a full document.



### Level 3: Supporting resources

Additional practice guides for practitioners responding to child sexual abuse concerns. 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\*](#)

[\*Using Supervision and Team Meetings to Improve Response to Child Sexual Abuse\*](#)

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

### 3. Why implement the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway in your local partnership?

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.

#### 3.1 Need for clearer guidance and support

A detailed scoping study undertaken at the inception of the Response Pathway, alongside consultation with a multi-agency reference group, brought together a wide range of evidence identifying where practitioners, managers and leaders needed clearer guidance and stronger support to identify and respond to child sexual abuse. These themes have remained consistent across inspections and reviews over the past six years.

More recently, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report *"I Wanted Them All to Notice": Protecting Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse within the Family Environment (2024)* has reinforced this picture, finding that "practitioners working with children and families have not been equipped with the knowledge, skills and practical guidance to identify and respond confidently when there are concerns of child sexual abuse in the family environment".

The report made a number of recommendations directly to safeguarding partnerships in England, one of which is the implementation of the Response Pathway. Mirroring this, the Welsh Government's National Strategy and Delivery Plan for Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse (2026) has set out a clear direction requiring coordinated multi-agency responses, and has committed to the development of national pathways to improve consistency and quality in multi-agency practice around identifying and responding to child sexual abuse.

This consistency of evidence highlights systemic gaps which require a coordinated and sustained response. The Response Pathway translates this evidence into practical guidance, but its impact depends on its being embedded within local safeguarding systems to ensure that practitioners are supported with the knowledge, clarity and confidence to respond – and that this is reinforced through leadership oversight and workforce development.

There is widespread recognition that agencies' collective approach to preventing, identifying, disrupting and responding to child sexual abuse needs to be improved. Practitioners working with children need a clear understanding of the specific actions and processes they must follow when they have concerns about child sexual abuse, so that they can act to ensure the safety and wellbeing of every child. The Response Pathway is aligned to legislation and safeguarding procedures across England and Wales, incorporated into the National Child Sexual Abuse Delivery Plan in Wales and linked to in [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2026\)](#).

*“Clear national pathways support consistent multi agency responses and reduce regional variation. Priority will be placed on embedding the national multi-agency pathway for child sexual abuse, ensuring it is fully understood and routinely applied across all relevant sectors.” (National Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse, Welsh Government, 2026)*

By highlighting the voices of children who have been sexually abused, the Response Pathway can help practitioners, managers and leaders 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 builds on evidence, current legislation, statutory guidance and existing national policies and procedures in England and Wales to provide **specific advice on child sexual abuse**. We recognise that the current professional climate is challenging, with various reforms, funding cuts and staff shortages in local safeguarding partnerships and board areas across England and Wales. The Response Pathway is designed to be flexible and does not create a new process, but instead seeks to **enhance the systems and services within which practitioners work**.

### 3.2 How the Response Pathway can help you

The Response Pathway was created for all practitioners working with children. It is particularly helpful for social workers, teachers, police officers, health professionals and those in the voluntary sector who work with children and families, as it:

- provides clarity on professional responsibilities and the actions required at key stages in the safeguarding and protection process
- can help inform and guide the particular steps you can take to protect and support children if you are concerned that they are being, or may have been, sexually abused
- sets out what you can and should do at different points along the way
- can help you understand the roles of other practitioners who may be involved
- can support consistent responses across teams and agencies and organisations within local areas
- places children’s needs and feelings at the centre of the process.

## 4. Using the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway in practice

It is clear from evaluating the implementation of the Response Pathway that there is no one 'best' way to use the resource, and that implementation will take a different form in each partnership or board area. While there are common features in how the Response Pathway has been embedded, local partnerships have adopted a range of approaches to implementation, and continue the process of using it in practice in different ways.

Practitioners, managers and leaders frequently share the Response Pathway with colleagues and/or use it to increase their own knowledge and understanding of child sexual abuse. Some have included the Response Pathway in training activities or used it to challenge decision-making. For others, the Response Pathway has increased their confidence in working with children and helped them discuss concerns and make referrals to specialist services.

*"It gives a real clear steer for training on child sexual abuse" (Survey: Training Officer, Solihull)*

*"From a practitioner level, people have been more confident to talk about [child sexual abuse]. Sometimes it's hard to even say 'child sexual abuse' and it's about naming it sometimes, isn't it? You hear [it mentioned] earlier on now ... that could be a sign ... even when it isn't the index concern." (Interview: Isle of Wight and Hampshire Safeguarding Children Partnerships)*

### 4.1 Impact on strategic thinking and planning

*"It is a great tool to look strategically at our local response and how we promote improvement of this. As lead for sexual abuse, I have used the Pathway to facilitate a task and finish group that aims to improve our response to child sexual abuse by embedding the Pathway and recommendations from audit." (Survey: Commissioning & Contract Manager for Domestic and Sexual Abuse, Solihull)*

Evaluations have revealed that adopting the Response Pathway has strengthened strategic thinking, enabling partnership areas to:

- begin developing a robust child sexual abuse strategy grounded in evidence and best practice
- improve data literacy and case auditing processes
- identify and address gaps in early identification and response
- enhance training provision with targeted, practical resources
- foster a culture of reflection and shared learning through structured forums.

Local safeguarding partnerships – including those that have implemented the Response Pathway without direct support from the CSA Centre – have indicated that increased awareness of the Response Pathway has led to strengthened strategic oversight and debate.

*“[Training on the Response Pathway] created quite a lot of discussion at our executive level in terms of how children are identified within the system, and I distinctly remember a debate about the number of children on child protection plans. So, the very fact that you’re talking about things like scale and nature, the historical context, what we’re seeing in practice now and seeing that generate debate, it’s what you need and want at your safeguarding partnership level.” (Interview: Isle of Wight and Hampshire)*

### **Using the Response Pathway to support strategic development: Feedback from Walsall Safeguarding Children Partnership**

*“The Response Pathway, alongside the ‘Starting Out’ implementation guide, supported our strategic development. The Response Pathway helped to shape our Child Sexual Abuse Strategy which is currently being refreshed and the implementation guide encouraged us to interrogate our data more effectively. We undertook focused audits to find out, for example, which services attend strategy meetings. Is health consistently represented? Are SARC services routinely invited? What is the quality of plans where child sexual abuse is a factor?”*

*The Quality Assurance activity we completed identified areas for improvement in identification and response, and so we integrated relevant sections of the Response Pathway. The ‘Starting Out’ resource also prompted a review of our training provision, leading us to commission a specialist child sexual abuse training package for our Multi-Agency Child Protection Team and key Safeguarding Leads across the partnership, e.g. police, social care, probation, health, education.”*

## **4.2 Structuring supervision and facilitating reflection spaces**

Implementation areas have explored how the Response Pathway can be used in supervision and the development of spaces for teams to discuss child sexual abuse concerns.

*“Supervision plays a vital role in implementing the Pathway. We have established practice clinics delivered by managers and set up reading days to go through it. 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?” (Interview: Lincolnshire)*

*“We are revisiting aspects of supervision and opportunities for peer reflection to create much needed thinking space for professionals working in this area. The Response Pathway is often referred to in the structured forums we’ve set up to discuss cases where there are concerns relating to sexual abuse and we hope to embed this fully into the supervisions that our Multi-Agency Child Protection Team will access in addition to the reflective sessions they offer to our partners. (Interview: Walsall)*

### **Consultation clinics led by Child Sexual Abuse Practice Leads**

Barking and Dagenham commissioned the CSA Centre to run Child Sexual Abuse Practice Leads Programmes<sup>1</sup> for social workers in 2021 and 2023. A total of 20 social workers attended these programmes, including the Service Manager coordinating the implementation of the Response Pathway.

The Practice Leads trained up through this programme now run ‘consultation clinics’ at 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 child sexual abuse 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 and where in the Pathway would be useful to follow.”*

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.”*

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<sup>1</sup> You can find out more about the Child Sexual Abuse Practice Leads Programme in our [training brochure](#) and associated [evaluation reports](#).

## 5. Before you implement the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway

If you are thinking of implementing the Response Pathway across your local partnership or safeguarding board, we recommend that you consider the ways in which it can be used to develop or review broader strategies on prevention, identification of and response to child sexual abuse. The experiences of the pilot partnership areas suggest that it is worth asking the following questions.

### 5.1 Why do you want to implement the Response Pathway?

Several safeguarding partnership areas using the Response Pathway revealed that a primary motivation for implementing it was to increase the confidence of practitioners in identifying and responding to concerns of child sexual abuse.

*“Practitioner confidence has been a priority for some time, since we undertook auditing considering the multi-agency response to child sexual abuse in 2023/2024 and developed our Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse toolkit for practitioners.” (Interview: Isle of Wight and Hampshire Safeguarding Children Partnerships)*

Strategic leaders in evaluated partnership areas felt that implementing the Response Pathway was an 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. Strategic leaders in evaluated local partnership areas stated that implementing the Response Pathway provided an 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 to put child sexual abuse ‘front and centre’ in their work.

*“[We] had written the sexual abuse procedures for the West Midlands and it made sense to then make that the Response Pathway.” (Interview: Solihull)*

*“[With a clear commitment] to embracing new approaches to improve our response to child sexual abuse, involvement in the testing and development of a new Pathway was perfectly timed and helped to consolidate the work already under way.” (Interview: 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.” (Interview: Lincolnshire)*

*You will need to ensure that both the vision and the ‘implementation ownership’ of the Response Pathway are shared across all partner agencies. Strategic leaders in the evaluated 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.” (Interview: Barking and Dagenham).*

It is important to maintain that support through communication and involvement with all partners at all points during the implementation process.

## 5.2 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.”  
(Interview: Bristol)*

Before starting to plan how to implement the Response Pathway, ensure that you have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the *current* response to child sexual abuse in your area. Our [Developing your Strategic Response to Child Sexual Abuse](#) guide details step by step the actions you can take to understand your current response, including what your partnership is already doing, what it is doing well, and where the challenges lie.

### **Know your data**

Think about the data on child sexual abuse that partnership agencies already collect *and* any 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 to 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 that progress to investigation.

Our [Data Insights Hub](#) can support these data collection processes.

### **Audit your existing response**

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.

## ***Identify training needs***

If professionals receive training on the scale and nature of child sexual abuse – in all its forms and contexts – it will enhance their knowledge and understanding of the abuse and how to respond to it. For more information on this, see the ‘training audit’ section of our guide [\*Developing Your Strategic Response to Child Sexual Abuse\*](#).

- Find out what training, strategies and procedures around child sexual abuse are currently in place in your partnership’s different agencies. Scope out unmet training needs across your partnership area in relation to child sexual abuse, identified through audit activity and a review of data collection and analysis.

Some safeguarding partnership areas have said they intend to share training opportunities through their community development teams with local community and faith groups:

*“That’s exactly where it [training] needs to go because ... lots of signs of sexual abuse will be picked up in those places outside of professionals.” (Interview: Solihull)*

## 6. Preparing to implement the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway

Once you are ready to begin implementing the Response Pathway in your local partnership, there are steps you can take to ensure that the implementation proceeds smoothly and effectively.

### 6.1 Establish strong commitment from all partnership agencies

From the outset, it is important to have strategic buy-in from across the partnership, including – but not limited to – education, health and police services. In Wales, that commitment has been provided by the Welsh Government, which will have oversight of the Response Pathway’s implementation across Wales. A clear commitment to implementing the Response Pathway, within each agency *and* across the multi-agency partnership, is required. It is important for leaders to understand the scale and nature of child sexual abuse and the national and local practice picture, and to be able to communicate this in relation to the national, regional or local strategy and implementation of the Response Pathway. These CSA Centre resources can help:

- [Scale and nature of child sexual abuse](#) – research reports summarising the findings from major surveys and analysing trends in official data over time
- [Data Insights Hub](#) – an interactive dashboard presenting the latest data from local authorities and police forces
- [Developing your strategic response to child sexual abuse](#) – a guide to building an effective, evidence-based strategy.

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

*“We have passionate leaders driving change within children’s social care and health, but we needed a more strategic, system-wide approach. Child sexual abuse is now a strategic priority for our local safeguarding children partnership (LSCP) with the Director of Children’s Services, Integrated Care Board Designated Safeguarding Nurse and Designated Doctor co-chairing a dedicated, multi-agency sub-group with representation from partners including police probation, SARC and substance misuse teams.”*  
(Interview: Walsall)

*“[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.”* (Interview: Lincolnshire)

*“[Our team] intentionally links Response Pathway learning into discussions at the Executive, board and subgroup levels. The Response Pathway is a central part of the local Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse toolkit. We focus on continual promotion and creating links across the whole partnership ... building the story.”* (Interview: Isle of Wight and Hampshire Safeguarding Children Partnerships)

## 6.2 Recruit a broad and representative steering group

As with any strategic vision, the steering group is integral to its success. It is essential that all partnership agencies are represented on the board or group overseeing implementation. We also strongly recommend that you have representation from voluntary-sector organisations (specialist services for child sexual abuse and others) and experts by experience, if possible. It is useful if 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 varied across the initial pilot areas and between the regional sites. However, evaluation findings highlight some commonalities:

- passionate strategic leaders who understood their local area, could communicate challenges well, and held children and families in mind
- child sexual abuse identified as a strategic priority and a safeguarding partnership sub-group or other steering group driving forward the work, and
- a written strategy, drawing on national, regional or local contexts, that is accessible and clear in its intentions for professionals and children and families as well as those that harm.

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

We recommend that any 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 one of the regional implementation areas. Note, however, that the aims, outcomes and activities that you develop will need to be specific to your partnership area.

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

Strategic aims	Intended outcomes
Effectively support and protect children who are being or have been sexually abused or are at risk of sexual abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioners, leaders and managers have a better understanding of their responsibilities in responding to the safeguarding and wellbeing of children who have been sexually abused</li> <li>• Practitioners, leaders and managers understand that a ‘No further police action at this time’ and/or a retraction does not mean that a child has not been or is not being sexually abused</li> <li>• Staff are more confident to ask or talk to children and parents about child sexual abuse</li> </ul>
Create a culture of multi-agency collaboration and transparent challenge allowing accountability and mutual support to flourish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioners, leaders and managers have a shared understanding of perpetrator behaviours and motivations to support risk assessment and safety planning</li> <li>• Policies, procedures and practice standards are embedded into multi-agency practice, to enable timely information-sharing and decision-making</li> <li>• Staff know whom to contact in different agencies</li> <li>• Staff are more aware of the need to share information and data with other agencies</li> </ul>

The Response Pathway implementation coordinator in the North West reflected on the region’s participation in the CSA Centre’s Theory of Change sessions:

*“Developing the Theory of Change brought clarity and cohesion to partners. The value wasn’t only in the final framework, but in the conversations it enabled, bringing partners together, surfacing different perspectives, and helping us understand our collective aims. It strengthened shared ownership and reinforced that meaningful change depends on systems leadership.*”

*“The North West’s ‘Tackling child sexual abuse’ strategy, and accompanying training and resources, has supported local and sub-regional areas to identify what’s working well and where time and improvement efforts are best focused. In one sub-region, it has led to the development of a more tailored strategy built on collaboration and shared practice understanding.”*

## 6.4 Engage frontline staff in the implementation process

All frontline professionals need to be aware of the Response Pathway as soon as its implementation begins, therefore, all partners need to agree in advance when and how they will engage their staff in the implementation process. The following comment highlights the need to understand the professional landscape in which the Response Pathway is being introduced with regards to resource constraints and existing policies and procedures.

*“The first message to staff is important, isn’t it? 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.” (Interview: Lincolnshire)*

## 6.5 Provide multi-agency training and development on child sexual abuse and the Response Pathway

It is essential for both strategic leaders and frontline professionals to become familiar with the Response Pathway – in its entirety as well as the aspects specific to particular areas of work – to understand how it works in a broader safeguarding context. Additionally, it is vital for strategic leaders and frontline professionals to be clear on how guidance in the Response Pathway aligns with 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 consider how their response can best help the child in *any* situation where there are concerns about child sexual abuse.

As part of its implementation support package, the CSA Centre delivers a series of free webinars designed to introduce professionals to both the Response Pathway and the evidence-based practice resources that supplement the guidance in the Response Pathway.

The CSA Centre’s introductory webinars for multiagency professionals focus on:

- [The Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway](#)
- [Signs and indicators template](#)
- [Communicating with children](#)
- [Supporting parents and carers](#)
- [Safety planning in education](#)
- [Talking about child sexual abuse in supervision and team meetings.](#)

The webinars are delivered regularly; they are free to attend but can be commissioned, if required. Details of these webinars and training courses are available in our [training brochure](#).)

## 6.6 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 will need to think about how you can integrate it across your partnership into existing policies and procedures relating to child sexual abuse or other strategic priorities, for example, neglect or domestic abuse. In each of the implementation areas, the steering group discussed ways to 'localise' the Response Pathway, acknowledging the need to align it with existing requirements.

The evaluated safeguarding partnership areas found that the learning sessions mentioned in section 5.5 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. The Pathway can guide how national bits can be 'done better'." (Interview: Lincolnshire)*

Some local partnership areas embedded the Response Pathway into existing safeguarding frameworks and workstreams. For example, in Solihull, the Response Pathway has been mapped against the 'harm outside the home' pathway from contextual safeguarding:

*"As we were developing the 'harm outside the home' (HOTH) pathway, it made sense to align that to the guides within the Response Pathway. Most children and young people who experience harm outside the home will have experienced ... some sort of threats in and around sex ... I wanted to bring that into people's forefront of thinking." (Interview: Solihull)*

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, as a new chapter of Practice Guidance. These procedures are well used and accessed by all safeguarding professionals. This is an important step to ensuring that professional know where to find the Response Pathway and evidence-based resources. As with any change programme, this works more effectively alongside wider strategic plans, effective communications and improved training and development.

## 6.7 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 5.3). 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 have implemented the Response Pathway and is it working?
- How will you know what difference the Response Pathway is making to practice?

In Table 2, we revisit the strategic aims and intended outcomes outlined in Table 1, highlighting the 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?
Effectively support and protect children who are being or have been sexually abused or are at risk of sexual abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioners, leaders and managers have a good understanding of their responsibilities in responding to the safeguarding and wellbeing of children who have been sexually abused</li> <li>• Practitioners, leaders and managers understand that a 'No further police action at this time' and/or a retraction does not mean that a child has not been or is not being sexually abused</li> </ul>	Increase in the number of contact and referral for child sexual abuse cases identified and responded to through existing criminal justice, child protection, 'child in need' and early help processes
Strengthen the multi-agency response to child sexual abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff know whom to contact in different agencies</li> <li>• Staff are more aware of the need to share information with other agencies</li> </ul>	<p>Increase in the proportion of child protection plans that have 'child sexual abuse' as a factor</p> <p>Increase in referrals to, for example, counselling services and paediatric sexual assault referral centres (P-SARC)</p>

## Appendix 1. Templates and links to support implementation of the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway

### DATA

- ✓ Understanding the [scale and nature of child sexual abuse](#), and agencies' response to it, including several downloadable infographics summarising key points is a vital starting point to reviewing your local response to child sexual abuse.
- ✓ The **Data Insights Hub** is an interactive dashboard designed to enable professionals, commissioners and researchers to find, understand and use official data. Using interactive maps and charts you can download, the Data Insights Hub provides the latest official data from local authorities and police forces, alongside up-to-date estimates on the scale of child sexual abuse. [Data Insights Hub](#)

### STRATEGY

- ✓ Guide to developing your **strategic response** to child sexual abuse [Developing your strategic response to child sexual abuse](#)
- ✓ Guide to create a **Theory of Change** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2QWPTYReaE> to support thinking on what you want to achieve.

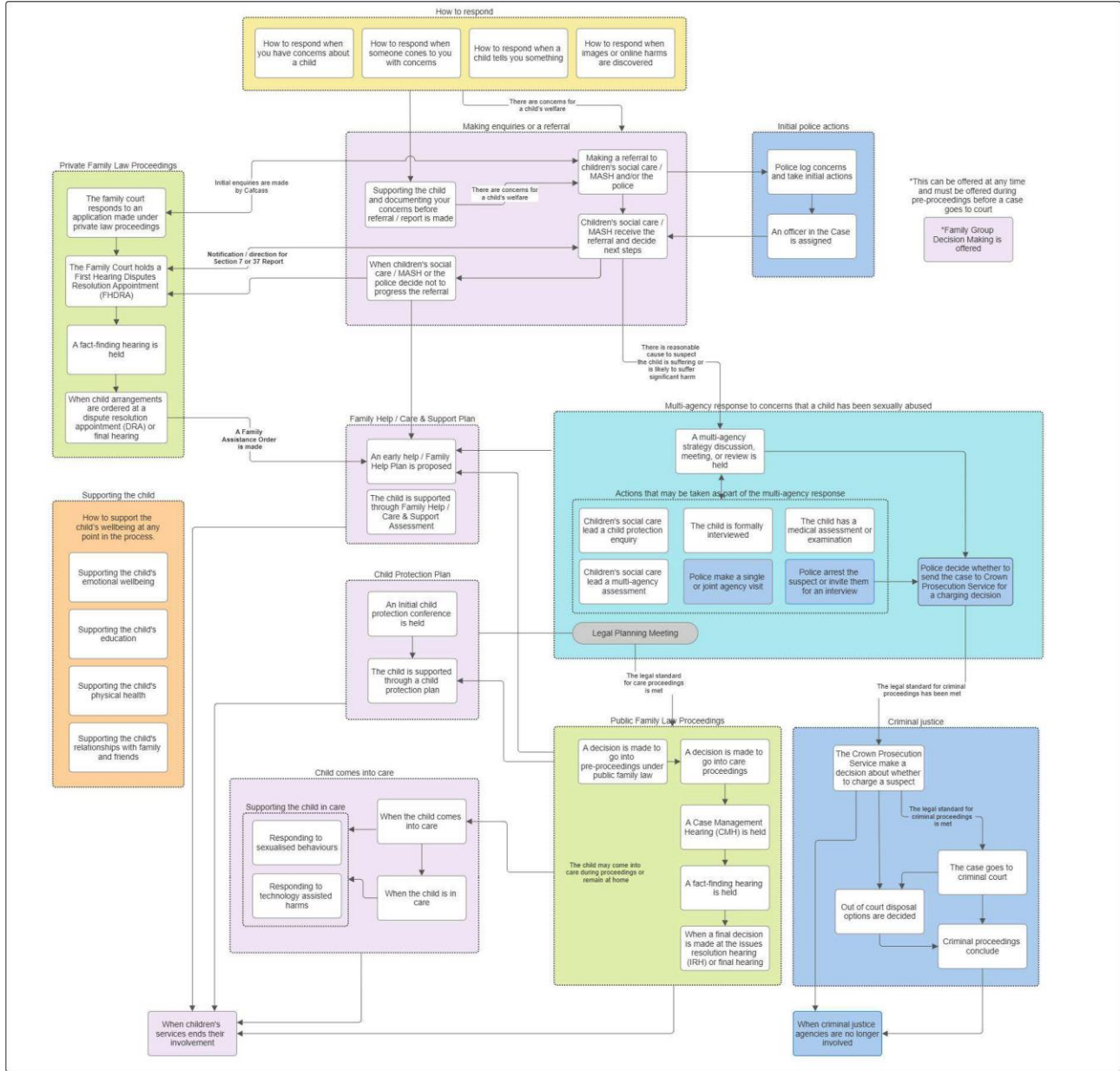
### SERVICE PROVISION AND TRAINING

- ✓ Comprehensive study of the current landscape of service provision in response to child sexual abuse across England and Wales [Support Matters](#)
- ✓ The **Child Sexual Abuse Support Matrix** is a template to help to identify gaps in local support provision, so you can consider how to fill these gaps and meet the needs of everyone who requires support. [Funding and Commissioning Child Sexual Abuse Services: Why It's Important, and How to Do It Well](#) and is to be used alongside our guide [Funding and Commissioning Child Sexual Abuse Services](#)
- ✓ What you need to know about child sexual abuse [What you need to know about child sexual abuse](#)
- ✓ 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

## **COMMUNICATION AND IMPACT**

- ✓ [Partnership briefing](#) to support your communication about the Response Pathway to engage and inform stakeholders about the implementation.
- ✓ Template wording for [Safeguarding procedures](#) or local website to promote the Response Pathway and supporting resources.
- ✓ Measure the impact of the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway [\*Measuring your Effectiveness: A Practical Guide for Services Working with Children and Young People Affected by Sexual Abuse\*](#)

# Appendix 2. The CSA Centre's Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway



## Appendix 3: Checklist for implementing the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway

### **1. Take time to understand the Response Pathway**

- Spend time exploring how the Response Pathway works and the guidance it provides (see section 2)
- Understand how it can strengthen local responses to child sexual abuse (see section 3)
- Consider how it could improve support and protection for children in your area (see section 5.1)

### **2. Pre-implementation: Assess current practice**

- Review existing data, identify gaps and additional needs
- Conduct an audit of current practice, including mapping current multi-agency responses (see section 5.2)
  - Highlight what works well
  - Identify what needs improvement
- Determine priority areas for development in your safeguarding partnership/board
- Assess workforce knowledge and identify training needs (see section 5.2)

### **3. Preparing to implement: Building the foundations**

- Secure commitment from all partner agencies (see section 6.1)
- Clarify relevance of the Response Pathway for each agency's role
- Establish a broad and representative multi-agency steering group (see section 6.2)
- Develop a shared vision using a Theory of Change (see section 6.3)
- Prepare frontline staff for the implementation of the Response Pathway (see section 6.4)
- Provide training for strategic leaders and frontline professionals (see section 6.5)

### **4. Embedding the Response Pathway**

- Integrate the Response Pathway into existing safeguarding policies/strategies/systems (see section 6.6)
- Consider how you will assess how successful the implementation of the Response Pathway has been (see section 6.7)