

Gwent Safeguarding: 7 Minute Briefing

Child Sexual Abuse – A Practitioner's Aide



What to do Learning Opportunity

Reflect on the subject discussed and think of how this subject could have presented in your work with vulnerable individuals?

Ask is there any relevance in cases you have worked or situations you have encountered?

What would you have done with such concerns when working with vulnerable individuals? And what are the barriers to practice in your organisation?

Identify key support for yourself in your team.

Reporting Child Sexual Abuse

- Given the dangers of waiting for children to disclose, referring to child protection services should also be based on perceived behaviours, professional judgment, and partial or retracted disclosures.
- If such concerns arise and a child is open or known to children services, a full referral is still necessary in order to share and investigate new information.
- Practitioners should be supported by the Achieving Best Evidence framework in order to protect evidence.
- Consideration should be given to any risks associated with telling the parents / carers about disclosures.

Recognising and Identifying Child Sexual Abuse (Cont'd)

- In later teenage years, we are more likely to see issues around eating disorders and attachment disorders
- We also see other concerns in terms of relationship forming as well as becoming sexually active at a much earlier age, sexually transmitted infections, unexplained bleeding and pregnancy also being indicators.
- Disguised compliance from parents / carers
- Evidence of children retracting disclosures / information and children being withdrawn from services

There exists an extensive range of inter-related mechanisms which operate to silence victims from talking about abuse:

- Self-blame: victims may feel that they have in some way caused the sexual abuse. This may be a result of grooming.
- Guilt and fear of the consequences
- Loyalty to other family members
- Fear of the perpetrator
- Being judged: a belief that others will hold the victim responsible, or that they will be stigmatised.
- A lack of opportunities to tell someone at the right time, in the right place and with the right person.
- A distrust of professionals: children may be concerned by the outcome of telling, including the possibility of being taken into care.

Context

As a response to several Child Practice Reviews within the Gwent region where child sexual abuse was a theme, this briefing will highlight key points and signpost practitioners to other practice resources.

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative or non-penetrative acts. They may include non contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. (All Wales Child Protection Procedures, 2008)

Prevalence*

Perpetrators

- Research demonstrates that the prevalence of sexual abuse could be as high as 11%;
- Child sexual abuse in and around the family is likely to account for around two-thirds of all child sexual abuse;
- Criminal justice and child protection systems are largely disclosure-led;

Victims

- Most victims of child sexual abuse do not come to the attention of statutory authorities;
- Most victims are female, though boys and young men are likely to be under-represented in the data;
- Many victims are sexually abused by more than one person;
- The serious impact of re-victimising children who are already vulnerable can not be under-estimated.
- For many victims of child sexual abuse in the family environment, abuse begins around age 9
- Many victims do not recognise that they have been sexually abused until much later in life
- Most victims linked to the family neither tell anyone nor come to the attention of the authorities until adulthood;
- Children from some Black and Minority Ethnic groups, and children with physical or learning difficulties, are less likely to come to the attention of the authorities as a victim of child sexual abuse in the family.

Helpful practice resources relating to child sexual abuse and Working to support Child Sexual Abuse victims

- www.parentsprotect.co.uk
- www.lucyfaithfull.org
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/abuse/sexual-abuse>
- <https://www.stopitnow.org.uk/wales.htm>

Recognising and Identifying Child Sexual Abuse

Key messages in relation to identification of child sexual abuse in the family environment are:

- Professionals and other adults continue to miss signs of children's sexual abuse. As full and immediate disclosure is rare, waiting for children to disclose abuse cannot be effective practice, so other signs should be explored and acted on.
- Adults capacity/ability to protect should be considered in terms of recognition and protection.
- Consideration of a child protection medical for all suspected cases (historical and acute) including repeat abuse. It is not just about forensics but also the health and wellbeing of the victim. Having had a physical examination may have a positive effect for the victim in later adult life.

Signs and symptoms which might indicate child sexual abuse: (The caveat being they are all things that might indicate other things as well):

- An inappropriately close relationship or attention seeking relationship with indiscriminate other children or adults.
- Good school attendance (can be perceived as a safe place)
- Family associates who appear evasive or less well known to services

* According to the Protecting children from harm: A critical assessment of child sexual abuse in the family network in England and priorities for action (November 2015) <https://www.cscb-new.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Child-sexual-abuse-protecting-children-from-harm-Nov-2015.pdf>

To access the website for the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board please follow the web link below:
<http://www.sewsc.org.uk/>