Information for parents, carers and other family members

Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

What we all need to know



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

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Together we can prevent child sexual abuse

What we need to know to protect our children

Most victims of child sexual abuse do not talk about it and cannot ask for help.

So adults have to.

By understanding the risks and putting in place family safety plans – we can prevent abuse from happening in the first place.

This leaflet aims to provide the information we all need to put in place preventative measures, recognise the warning signs of child sexual abuse - and to build the confidence to do something about it.



What's the risk?

It is only in recent years that we have come to appreciate the true scale of the sexual abuse of children.

The secrecy surrounding such abuse is evident in the fact that 1 in 3 children who are sexually abused by an adult do not tell anyone. Of those who do tell, most tell a family member or friend. Hardly any come to the attention of police, social services or health professionals.

Key facts

- **1 in 3 children** sexually abused by an adult do not tell anyone
- **4 out of 5 children** abused by a peer told no one else at the time
- **Only 1 in 8** sexually abused children are known to the authorities
- **90% of sexually abused children** are abused by someone they know
- **Around a third of sexual abuse** is committed by other children and young people
- **Disabled children** are over 3 times more likely to be abused than non-disabled children
- **There is no stereotypical abuser** - abusers come from all walks of life – and from all socioeconomic backgrounds

Who sexually abuses children?

Sexual abusers can be anyone – men, women, young people, children, family members, friends or professionals known to a child. They are:-

- **people we know**
- **people we care about**
- **people from all classes, cultures and backgrounds**

How do they do it?

By justifying their behaviour to themselves

People who sexually abuse children justify their behaviour to themselves in various ways. It is not easy to understand how seemingly ordinary people can do such things to children. Some people who sexually abuse children recognise that it is wrong and are deeply unhappy about what they are doing. Others believe their behaviour is OK and that what they do shows their love for children.

By getting close to children and adults – the grooming process

People who abuse children often build a relationship with the child and the caring adults who want to protect them. Many are good at making 'friends' with children and those close to them. Some may befriend parents who are having difficulties, sometimes on their own. Others will present themselves as trustworthy and offer to babysit or other support with childcare. Some seek trusted positions in the community which put them in contact with children.

By silencing children

People who sexually abuse children may offer a combination of gifts or treats and threats about what will happen if the child says 'no' or tells someone. They may make the child afraid of being hurt physically, but more usually the threat is about what may happen if they tell, for example, the family breaking up or the perpetrator going to prison. In order to keep the abuse secret the abuser will often play on the child's fear, embarrassment or guilt about what is happening, perhaps convincing them that no one will believe them.

"He looks so ordinary and is great with kids. I'd have never recognised him as an abuser."

Mother of 7-year-old boy abused by a neighbour

Why don't children tell?

Children do not tell for a variety of reasons. In a recent study, these were the top 10 reasons given for keeping the abuse a secret:

- **It's a private / family matter**
- **I don't have anyone to tell**
- **I don't think they will be sympathetic**
- **I'm scared of more violence**
- **I don't want the police involved**
- **It's too humiliating**
- **I don't think they will do anything about it**
- **They won't believe me**
- **I don't want to go to court**
- **It's too trivial**

ONS, Abuse during childhood Findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, year ending March 2016

Signs to watch out for in children and young people

Children often show us – rather than tell us – that something is upsetting them. There may be many reasons for changes in their behaviour, but if we notice a combination of worrying signs, it may be time to seek help or advice.

What to watch out for in children:

- **Unexpected change in behaviour or personality**
- **Regressing to younger behaviours**
- **Having nightmares**
- **Acting out in sexual ways with toys or objects**
- **Unaccountable fears of people or places**
- **Becoming secretive**
- **Physical signs, such as, unexplained soreness or bruises around genitals or mouth, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy**
- **Showing a sexual awareness beyond their age**
- **Inappropriate affection**
- **Unexplained money or gifts**
- **Outbursts of anger**
- **Becoming withdrawn**
- **Displaying anxiety**
- **Becoming clingy**
- **Becoming depressed**
- **Displaying obsessive behaviour**
- **Self-harm**

If you have worries about a child's behaviour, seek advice. You can call the Stop it Now! Helpline on 0808 1000 900 to talk in confidence.

Signs in adults that they may pose a risk

The signs that an adult may be using their relationship with a child for sexual reasons may not be obvious. We may feel uncomfortable about the way they play with the child, or seem always to be favouring them and creating reasons for them to be alone.

There may be cause for concern about the behaviour of an adult or young person if they:

- **Refuse to allow a child sufficient privacy or to make their own decisions on personal matters**
- **Insist on physical affection with a child – kissing, hugging, wrestling**
- **Give gifts to a child excessively**
- **Take photographs or keep mementos of children who are not their own**
- **Talk about sex frequently, tell sexual jokes and discusses sex with children**
- **Treat a particular child as a favourite, making them feel 'special' compared with others**
- **Seek to be, or is often, alone with a child in a house, car or room**
- **Display child orientated behaviours or engage in childlike behaviour**
- **Are overly interested in a child's personal development**
- **Pick on a particular child**

If you have a 'gut feeling' about potential inappropriate behaviour, seek advice. You can call the Stop it Now! Helpline on 0808 1000 900 to talk in confidence.

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Together we can prevent child sexual abuse

What increases a child's and family's vulnerability?

Any child can be abused. There is no stereotypical victim.

However, children and young people can be especially vulnerable if they are lonely, or feel isolated. They may have fallen out with their friends, or not like the way they look. Their behaviour could become challenging or they may seek extra attention. They may start taking greater risks than they normally would.

When they are like this, they may be more challenging for us as parents, and it can be quite easy to switch off as they are "hard work". But in fact, this is when they need us most as parents.

Some factors which can increase a child's vulnerability:

- **Lack of parental supervision, heavy reliance on babysitters**
- **Poor or negative communication**
- **Lack of accurate sexual education**
- **Poorly defined family boundaries**
- **Lots of acquaintances/visitors**
- **Lack of understanding of appropriate adult/child relationships**
- **Experiences of witnessing violent, aggressive relationships**
- **Isolated, lonely, emotionally deprived children**
- **Substance/alcohol misuse in the home**

What to do if a child tells you about abuse

Respond with care and urgency

If you think a child is trying to tell you about a sexually abusive situation, respond promptly and with care. The police and children's social care have joint working arrangements for responding to suspected child sexual abuse. They are experienced in this work and will deal sensitively with the child and family.

Believe the child

If a child trusts you enough to tell you about abuse, you must remember that they rarely lie about such things. Although it may be hard to believe that someone we trust or care about is capable of sexually abusing a child, it is highly unlikely that a child would deliberately make false accusations about sexual abuse.

The pressures on the child to keep silent are enormous. It takes tremendous courage to talk about abuse. A child's claim that sexual abuse did not happen (when it actually did), or taking back a disclosure of abuse are common. Sometimes the child's account of what happened changes or evolves over time. This is a common pattern for disclosure and should not invalidate their story.

Be supportive

It is important that they feel supported - do not dismiss their claims or put them off talking about it.

Stay calm

If they are talking to you about it, do not get angry or upset. Stay calm and steady. If you get angry, the child may think you are going to punish them - this will play into the hands of the abuser who warned the child not to tell. If the child fears you will become upset or distressed, they are less likely to disclose in order to protect you emotionally.

Be caring

Make sure the child knows you love them and that they have done nothing wrong - and keep telling them. The child will need to see that adults believe them and they are doing all they can to protect them. Make sure the child knows they were right to talk about it and that you are glad they came to you.

Face the problem

When the abuse is known, adults must face the problem honestly, protect the child at all costs, and place responsibility appropriately with the abuser.

Re-establish safety

Do what is necessary to protect the child from further harm. Put into place a family safety plan. Information can be found on our Parents Protect! website **www.parentsprotect.co.uk**

Get help

Get help from professionals who can help guide you towards safety and healing. Information on sources of help can be found on our Parents Protect! website **www.parentsprotect.co.uk**

Do not despair

Children can and do recover from child sexual abuse. It is incredibly difficult to hear that someone you love has been hurt in such a way but help to recover is available.

What if I have concerns about my child?

If you have concerns, do not ignore them.

You may find talking through your concerns helpful, before deciding what to do. You can contact the organisations listed below for advice:

Stop it Now! Helpline to speak in confidence	**0808 1000 900**
NSPCC 24 hour helpline	**0808 800 500**

Social Services:

You can contact your local authority on their main number and ask for Children's Services for professional help/advice from a social worker.

If your child is in immediate danger CALL THE POLICE on 999

Positive preventative action you can take

Know the signs – child sexual abuse/'grooming'

Warning signs is just another way of saying 'opportunity to prevent and protect'. Acting on the signs can prevent it from happening in the first place.

Know what increases vulnerability

If we know what makes children more vulnerable – we can help to make them safer.

Educate everyone in the family

Understanding the issues and passing information on will help protect children from harm.

Open lines of communication

Starting conversations around sexual behaviour or concerns you have is vital. But it is not a one-time only event – let everyone know it is ok to ask questions.

Talk with others and get safe adults involved

Be sure that no one in your family is isolated and that everyone has someone to talk to.

Seek help and advice

For most people child sexual abuse is difficult to think about or talk about. But you are not alone, so seek help and advice.

If you need any help or advice – or would like to discuss how child sexual abuse can be prevented - you can call the Stop it Now! Helpline on 0808 1000 900 to talk in confidence.

Ideas to start a conversation with your child

Thinking about talking to your child can feel scary. But it doesn't need be. Start with simple conversations about how their body belongs to them, and explain the difference between 'good' and 'bad' secrets.

- **Pick the right time: Bath-time, walking home from school or in the car are all opportunities to have that first talk**
- **Avoid scary words but say that their body belongs to them, and that they can say no if someone tries to touch them**
- **Introduce the subject by saying "can I talk to you about this - because it's important to me"**
- **Approach the conversation in the same way you would teach children how to play with others and explain where it is ok to touch people**
- **Tell them the difference between a "good secret" - like a surprise party - and a "bad secret" - one which you can never tell anyone**

Don t be afraid to ask questions – and follow your gut instinct

Who is caring for your children?
Sleepovers, family members, paid carers?

What is your child's school doing?
Personal safety, healthy relationships, self-protection?

What are your family boundaries?
Privacy, supervision, family visitors, children's friends?

Resources

There are many resources available to you and your family to help prevent child sexual abuse. Here are just some of them:

Family Safety Plan

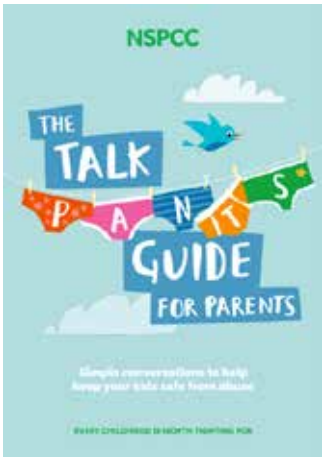
A guide on how to create a family safety plan to keep children safe – available on **www.parentsprotect.co.uk**





NSPCC Underwear Rule: 'Pantosaurus'

With the help of a friendly dinosaur, these resources help parents talk to their children about body safety **– search online for 'Pantosaurus'**





The Parents Protect! website & learning programme

A website giving preventative information and advice, including a 30 minute learning video which covers the key issues in detail – **www.parentsprotect.co.uk**

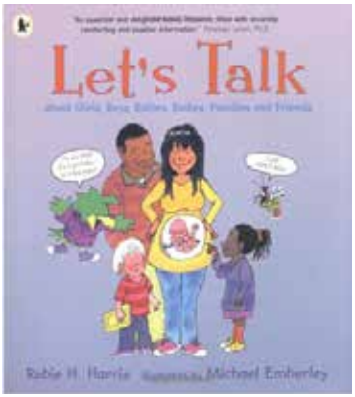


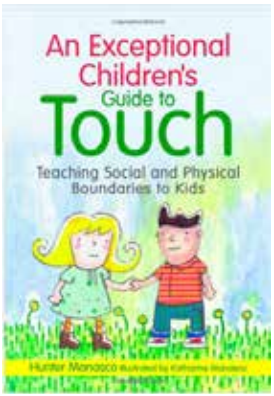


What to do if your child gets in trouble online

Books for children

There are books available to help you start some really important conversations with your children. However, before you read them with your child, read them through yourself first, so that you can judge if the information is appropriate for your child and so you are familiar with the story. A recommending reading list is available on the website: **www.parentsprotect.co.uk**







Call the confidential Stop it Now! Helpline:
0808 1000 900

To send the Helpline a confidential message visit:
contactus.stopitnow.org.uk

If you are unsure or worried about any issues relating to child sexual abuse, our experienced advisors will talk over your worries with you and can offer confidential advice on what steps you could take.

www.stopitnow.org.uk

www.parentsprotect.co.uk

www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk



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