



# Swindon Local Safeguarding Children Board

## Learning from Case Reviews: July 2018

### Child Sexual Abuse

- ✓ The [LSCB Website](#) provides local information, guidance and links to a number of [multi-agency child protection courses](#), including Responding to Sexual Abuse
- ✓ The [South West Child Protection Procedures](#) provides further reading, information and guidance about sexual abuse
- ✓ [The NSPCC](#) provides useful information and guidance for professionals working with children who have been sexually abused
- ✓ [Letting the Future in Programme](#) is run by the NSPCC in Swindon and supports children who have been sexually abused through specialist play therapy (in addition to this they also offer an adapted version for children with learning disabilities)

**Procedures for escalating concerns are not always followed. It's OK to disagree, if you believe that what is happening is not in the best interests of the child you must speak up.**

The safety of individual children is the paramount consideration in any professional disagreement and any unresolved issues should be addressed with due consideration to the risks that might exist for the child. **Everyone should feel able to challenge decision-making** via the [LSCB Escalation Policy](#) - practitioners should see this as their right and responsibility in order to promote the best multi-agency safeguarding practice.

There can be a view that once concerns are shared this somehow lowers the risk for the child. Practitioners may not see a reduction in risk after sharing their concerns and the next level of the Escalation Policy **must** be instigated. Chronologies and case recording provide little evidence to suggest that pre-escalation discussions take place, or indeed the subsequent stages of the escalation policy are initiated in line with timescales.

**Professionals do not always understand the extent of a child's learning disability and the increased risks and vulnerabilities they may be subject to.**

Research tells us that **disabled children are more vulnerable to abuse** and are over 3 times more likely to be abused than non-disabled children. Awareness amongst professionals about safeguarding disabled children, the impact of disability and what constitutes best practice, is essential. It is important for professionals to understand terminology; children are often referred to as having a learning difficulty, when in fact they have a learning disability.

- 'Learning difficulty' is a term generally used within education that describes children who are working at a level that is below average for their chronological age or may have a specific difficulty
- 'Learning Disability' is defined by the world health organisation as 'a condition of arrested or incomplete development of the mind occurring during and continuing beyond the developmental period (age <16)'. There is a reduced level of intellectual functioning resulting in a diminished ability to adapt to the daily demands of the normal social environment and leave a child more vulnerable to abuse.

**Responses to sexual abuse concerns are sometimes inadequate and opportunities are missed to safeguard against further abuse.** Practitioners may witness behaviours that cause concern, it is important to monitor these behaviours and **discuss in supervision** or with your safeguarding lead. This will provide an opportunity to **reflect** on these behaviours and try to establish a root cause. Professionals working with victims of sexual abuse should identify situations that place children at greater risk and ensure appropriate safety measures are in place to reduce the risk. **Support should be offered to all victims of sexual abuse.**

### Child Sexual Abuse: Learning from Case Reviews

This short briefing summarises what recent case reviews have told us about risk factors and learning for improved practice around child sexual abuse. This briefing is aimed at anyone working with children and families in Swindon and provides key findings, recommendations and links to guidance.

#### National Facts and Statistics (source: NSPCC)

- ✓ 1 in 20 children in the UK have been sexually abused
- ✓ 1 in 3 children sexually abused by an adult did not tell anyone
- ✓ Over 90% of abused children were abused by someone they know
- ✓ Disabled children are over 3 times more likely to be abused than non-disabled children

The definition of Child Sexual Abuse can be found in [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018: Sexual Abuse](#) 'Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.'

**There is a lack of clarity about individual roles and responsibilities and communication is not always effective across teams.**

Joined up working between teams is important to ensure children are kept safe. Parents are often told they need to keep their child safe, without explanation or support about what keeping safe means. Joined up working between services that support adults and services that support their children helps ensure that parents understand what is being expected of them. In complex cases where a family is dealing with many issues it is vital that a **holistic joint working approach** is used to:-

- Specifically identify and manage risk
- Plan an effective safety plan which is explained clearly to the family
- Assess whether there is progress being made and the child is safer

#### Signs and Indicators of Sexual Abuse

- ✓ Change in behaviour
- ✓ Unusual sexualised behaviour
- ✓ Over attentive to adults
- ✓ Unusual interest in genitalia
- ✓ Displays of sexuality (masturbation)
- ✓ Aggression
- ✓ Eating disorder
- ✓ Change in eating habits
- ✓ Difficulty sleeping / nightmares
- ✓ Bedwetting / soiling
- ✓ Anger
- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Poor self-esteem
- ✓ Withdrawn or anxious
- ✓ Takes risks
- ✓ Unusual sexualised language
- ✓ Drug and alcohol use
- ✓ Running away
- ✓ Reluctance to undress
- ✓ Poor personal hygiene
- ✓ Pregnancy
- ✓ Bruises, scratches, marks
- ✓ Misses school
- ✓ Self-harm
- ✓ Avoids being alone with a particular person
- ✓ Anal or vaginal soreness
- ✓ Unusual discharge
- ✓ Sexually transmitted infection
- ✓ Clingy
- ✓ Obsessive behaviour
- ✓ Suicidal thoughts

**Concerned about a child? Contact the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH); 01793 466903 / [fcp@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:fcp@swindon.gov.uk)**