

## Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

# What we all need to know



Ariennir gan  
**Lywodraeth Cymru**  
Funded by  
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**stop it now!** Cymru Wales  
Together we can prevent **child sexual abuse**

# Introduction

Most victims of child sexual abuse don't talk about it and can't ask for help.

So adults have to.

By understanding the risks, and knowing what to do if we have a concern – 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 stats

- **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.**

# 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**



# Managing disclosures

If you think a child is trying to tell you about a sexually abusive situation, respond promptly and with care.

## DO:

- Listen carefully
- Try not to interrupt or ask questions
- Accept what the child is telling you
- Record the conversation in the child's words
- Note the time
- Sign and date the record you make
- Take it seriously
- Reassure they are right to tell
- Explain what will happen next
- Do not delay
- Inform the designated person for child protection

## DON'T

- Ask leading questions
- Make promises you cannot keep
- Jump to conclusions
- Speculate or accuse anyone
- Ask the child to repeat the disclosure over and over
- Promise confidentiality
- Investigate

**It is not your responsibility to decide if the allegation is true or not. It is your responsibility to record and report.**

# If you have concerns

*You should follow your policies and procedures if you have concerns.*

You should report them to your designated officer immediately, and do not investigate yourself. You should contact your local Children's Services – Duty and Assessment team to discuss your concerns.

**You can also contact the Stop it Now! Helpline for anonymous advice – 0808 1000 900.**

**The NSPCC 24 hour child protection Helpline is also available – 0808 800 500.**

**If a child is in immediate danger CALL THE POLICE on 999.**

# Why refer or report?

As people working with children, young people and families, we have a duty to ensure their safety. If we have a concern, or a niggling doubt, it can be daunting to take action. But we must.

**We need to refer or report because:**

- **Children have a right to be safe**
- **Adults have a responsibility to protect children**
- **Abuse and neglect are damaging**
- **Child abuse and neglect continue because of the secrecy and silence which surround them**
- **You only have one piece of the jigsaw – other agencies may have other pieces**
- **Children rarely lie about abuse**
- **An abuser may well abuse many other children who also have a right to protection**

**We know taking action can be daunting, so if you want to discuss your concerns you can contact the Stop it Now! Helpline for anonymous advice – 0808 1000 900.**

# Positive preventative action you can take in your role

We can all take some simple steps to help ensure the safety of children and young people.

*As people working with children or families, we should:*

- **Know the signs of child sexual abuse and grooming**
- **Know what increases a child's and a family's vulnerability**
- **Educate everyone in the workplace/family**
- **Use resources for parents or professionals – use books, videos, and activities**
- **Have open conversations with colleagues – share knowledge and discuss concerns**
- **Seek help and advice**
- **Make sure everyone knows how to report**
- **Keep lines of communication open**

# Final thoughts

Pay attention to signs in children AND those adults around them.

Talk to children and really listen to what they have to say.

Consider what actions as a protective adult YOU will now take to prevent child sexual abuse.

# Resources

There are many resources available to you and the families you work with 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](http://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

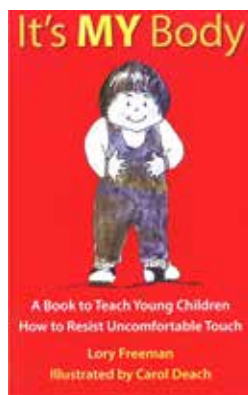
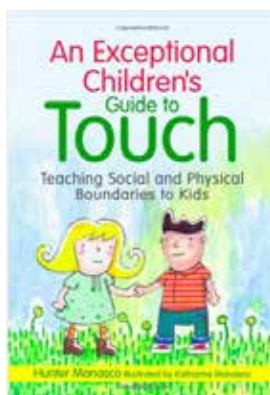
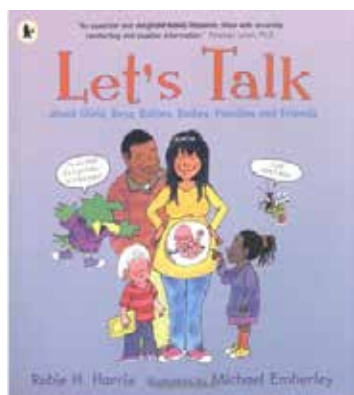
A website giving preventative information and advice, including a 30 minute learning video which covers the key issues in detail – [www.parentsprotect.co.uk](http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk)



**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](http://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](https://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](https://www.stopitnow.org.uk)**

**[www.parentsprotect.co.uk](https://www.parentsprotect.co.uk)**

**[www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk](https://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk)**



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