

# Understanding the impact of abuse on the child


## activity

### The grooming process and the impact on the child

- Recap on the previous session and discuss any matters arising.
- Begin by emphasising the grooming process. Explore how issues identified in the previous session played out in the parent's (or parents') relationship with the abuser and how the family dynamics were affected. Discuss the difficulties for an abused child in this situation: How can they stop what is happening? Who can they tell?
- Discuss the short- and long-term impact of sexual abuse on children and what can be done to help children recover. (See 'Understanding the impact of abuse' [WA-2]; 'What helps children recover?' [WA-3]; and 'Protective parenting quiz' [WA-4].)
- Explain the vital role of protective parents and caregivers in promoting therapeutic work with children and young people. For more information see the briefing paper for practitioners 'Introduction to the *Working with child sexual abuse* intervention guide' [WA-B1].

## practice assignment

### What I can do now



Consider what you can start to do today to help your child recover from sexual abuse. Bring your ideas back to the next session.

### Prevention of further child sexual abuse

Recap on the previous session and discuss the practice assignment.

## activity

### Preventing sexual abuse

Having considered how children are affected by sexual abuse, and the effects they might suffer as a result, this session concentrates on prevention.

n w
Understanding the impact of abuse
1 of 3

● Begin by emphasising the grooming process; victims have been identified in the previous session about the parent's or parents' relationship with the abuser and how the family dynamics were affected. Discuss the difficulties for an abused child in this situation: How can they stop what is happening? Who can they tell?

● Discuss the short- and long-term impact of sexual abuse on children and what can be done to help children recover. (See 'Understanding the impact of abuse' [WA-2]; 'What helps children recover?' [WA-3]; and 'Protective parenting quiz' [WA-4].)

● Explain the vital role of protective parents and caregivers in promoting therapeutic work with children and young people. For more information see the briefing paper for practitioners 'Introduction to the *Working with child sexual abuse* intervention guide' [WA-B1].

● Discuss the difficulties for an abused child in this situation: How can they stop what is happening? Who can they tell?

● Discuss the short- and long-term impact of sexual abuse on children and what can be done to help children recover. (See 'Understanding the impact of abuse' [WA-2]; 'What helps children recover?' [WA-3]; and 'Protective parenting quiz' [WA-4].)

● Explain the vital role of protective parents and caregivers in promoting therapeutic work with children and young people. For more information see the briefing paper for practitioners 'Introduction to the *Working with child sexual abuse* intervention guide' [WA-B1].

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What helps children recover?

● The child is able to tell and be believed as soon as possible after the onset of abuse.

● The protective parent(s) takes immediate decisive action to prevent – i.e. ensure that the alleged abuser cannot have access to the child again. The abuser is removed.

● The child is able to talk about the abuse to the protective parent(s) without fear of them falling apart emotionally; the child needs to see that the parent can cope.

● The child being able to tell about the abuse and receive comforting information to counteract any distorted attitudes and beliefs acquired from the abuser.

● Name all the parent(s), 'What can you start to do today to help your child recover from what has happened?'

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Protective parenting quiz
1 of 3

The quiz should be completed after the main educational session and prior to the session focusing on prevention (i.e. preventing open communication in families; formulating a family safety plan; identifying useful sources of information/ support).

Questions should correspond with what has been covered in the preceding session; accordingly questions can be asked in or out of order from those below. This is done to ensure that a weak or uncertain learning, identify gaps in knowledge or understanding and gauge the parent's ability to create information.

The exercise is best done in one session, the practitioner having written the questions on a flip chart and the parent then writing down their answers. If the parent struggles to read or write, the practitioner can ask each question in turn and write down the parent's verbal responses. When all questions have been answered, they can be discussed as a group. When more than one family member is participating in the work, they should write down their answers separately and then compare and discuss them with the help of the practitioner.

1. How many children experience harmful sexual behaviour before 16?
2. Most commonly, where does child sexual abuse take place?
3. Who abuses children?
4. Give three reasons why victims do not tell.
5. For each of the scenarios below (as applicable), give three reasons why someone might want to engage in sexual behaviour with a child.
  - = another child
  - = an adolescent
  - = an adult?
6. How might an abuser groom a parent/carer to persuade them that he or she is safe?
7. How might an abuser groom a victim to gain their compliance and prevent disclosure (i.e. get the victim to go along with the abuse and not tell)?
8. What constitutes consent?
9. Name three immediate and three long-term effects of child sexual abuse.
10. How can parent/carer role model for their children – i.e. prevent a positive female role model; prevent a positive male role model; prevent a positive co-offender role model?

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The most effective way of preventing sexual harm to children is by you being alert to risk indicators in potential abusers, rather than waiting for your child to show signs of abuse or make a disclosure. Importantly, you need to know what to do if you have concerns.

Looking back at the sessions exploring 'grooming' behaviours, what behaviours might you notice in adults that would now prompt you to take protective action? List these in categories: family member, intimate partner/boyfriend, family friend/neighbour, teacher/youth worker, etc. [See 'How can I protect my child?' [WA-5]]

**n w** How can I protect my child? 1 of 4

Give the message that the most effective way of preventing sexual harm to children is by sharing protective precautions to risk indicators to potential abusers, rather than waiting for a child to show signs of abuse or to make a disclosure. Importantly, the protective parent needs to know what to do if they have concerns about sexual harm.

Looking back at the sessions exploring 'grooming' behaviours, ask the parent to think of behaviours that they observe in adults which would now prompt them to take protective action. List these in categories: family member, intimate partner/boyfriend, family friend/neighbour, teacher/youth worker, etc.

**Spotting risk indicators in others**

Ask parents to complete the 'Spotting risk indicators in others' worksheet below. The parent completed list of examples of risk indicators can be given to parents to add to their own list of risk indicators if you think this would help them.

**Establishing open communication between parent and child**

Encourage parents to establish open communication with their children. It is helpful to establish personal boundaries in the home about, for example, nudity and privacy. Help children to speak up and to know what to do if this. There are useful books and other resources to assist parents with communication about personal safety.

**Taking precautions around a new partner**

Encourage parents to take precautions around a new partner. Help them identify protective adults in the family or social or professional network and agree a family safety plan.

## Establishing open communication between parent and child

Discuss how young children can be taught about personal safety by conveying basic information in the normal course of parenting: private parts of the body (i.e. any area normally covered by a swimsuit), names for these, good and bad touch, keeping secrets, etc. For children of all ages, ask the parent to draw up a list of clear rules about nudity, personal privacy, general safety (including use of the Internet, mobile phones, etc.) in the home: 'In our house we...', 'In our house we don't...'.  
 Emphasise the importance of listening to children and answering their questions about sex and aspects of adult behaviour about which they may be curious.



Answer simply and truthfully within the scope of your child's understanding. It is very important to demonstrate that there is nothing your child cannot tell you. You can show this by being prepared to listen and respond without overreacting or blaming, and showing you can hear it whatever it is.

- Tell the parents about useful books and websites to assist parent-child communication about personal safety (see 'Useful resources' [WA-6]).
- Ask the parents to identify and name trusted adults in the child's world in whom they can confide. Involve the child in identifying these adults. If the child seems reluctant to confide in someone, listen to the child.

All these discussions will help to build resilience and confidence, making it more likely that the child will speak out if something happens that troubles them or that they don't understand.

**h** Useful resources

**Books**

- My Teaching Book For Little People and My Big People*, Ian Hindeau, 1983, Dutton, OR: McChesnut-Hudson.
- All About Your Child's Guide to Your Family's Home Sexually Abused*, Steven Hocken, 2011, Little Eagle, Boreham House Publishing.
- Family At Risk: A Guide for Parents of Young People Who Have Sexually Abused*, Steven Hocken, 2011, Little Eagle, Boreham House Publishing.
- My Body Belongs to Me*, Jill Santibanez, 2008, New York, NY: Safety Star Media.
- Now That We Know: Helping Your Child After Sexual Abuse*, Jennifer L. Lyle-Pick, 2012, Kindle edition, 2012 edition from www.CarenetTheTrust.com.
- Some Secrets Should Never Be Kept*, Jessica Sanders, 2011, Victoria, Australia: Lyle and Publishing.
- Strong Mothers: A Resource for Mothers and Carers of Children Who Have Been Sexually Abused*, Anne Pithie and Melissa Thomas, 1997, Lyle and Pick, Boreham House Publishing.
- The Protection Handbook*, Geoffrey Smith, 2008, London: BAAF.

**Websites**

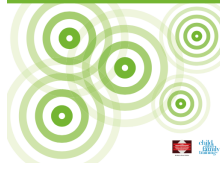
- Advice for Children [www.actionchildline.org.uk](http://www.actionchildline.org.uk)
- Advice for Parents [www.actionchildline.org.uk](http://www.actionchildline.org.uk)
- Childline [www.childline.gov.uk](http://www.childline.gov.uk)
- Family Line [www.familyline.org.uk](http://www.familyline.org.uk)
- The Lucy Faithfull Foundation [www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk](http://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk)
- Mosaic [www.mosaic.org.uk](http://www.mosaic.org.uk)
- NSPCC [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)
- Parent Project [www.parentproject.co.uk](http://www.parentproject.co.uk)
- Stop a Niece [www.stopaniece.org.uk](http://www.stopaniece.org.uk)

**Helplines**

- Family Line 0800 800 2222
- NSPCC 0800 800 3000
- Stop a Niece 0800 8000 8000

**Child sex offender disclosure scheme**

To find out if a named person is known to pose a risk of sexual harm to your children, contact your local police and ask for details of the scheme.



## Precautions around a new partner

Looking back at the session on identifying grooming behaviours in others, ask parents to say what precautions they would take before committing to a new relationship. These might include getting to know the new person well before introducing them to the children; meeting the person's friends and family; allowing their friends and family to meet the new person; requesting a disclosure under the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme; delaying sexual intimacy between them. If the potential partner applies pressure to meet the children, have sex or move in before the parent is ready, these would be warning signs.

## Formulating a family safety plan

### activity

#### Making a plan using prevention pointers and safety resources

This exercise should pull together all the 'prevention' pointers covered in the preceding sessions and form them into a practical plan. The pointers could be listed under headings – for example, What I need to do; What I will teach and expect of my children; What I will expect of others who have contact with my children; What people in my support network need to know; What I would do if I was concerned about someone's behaviour.

Discuss with parents any difficulties they might face in putting the plan into action. (See 'Family safety plan' [WA-7].)

### tips

Put the information you are giving and receiving on a flip chart (pictorial, diagrammatical or clear bullet point format works best). Apart from anything else, it takes the intense focus away from the parent with whom you are working and also provides a dynamic record of the work undertaken.

