

Stop It Now!

WALES | CYMRU

Helping prevent
child sexual abuse



Preventing child sexual abuse – a toolkit for practitioners

This toolkit provides information, support and resources needed to confidently manage any issues you find and to pass on key messages to help protect children within your community.

[Click to start](#)



Call our confidential helpline **0808 1000 900** For more information visit stopitnow.org.uk/helpline

**THE
LUCY FAITHFULL
FOUNDATION**

Working to protect children

Toolkit contents



- [Who we are](#)
- [Our vision, mission and promise](#)
- [Who is this toolkit for?](#)
Self-care for practitioners
- [The context - children's rights](#)
- [Why has this toolkit been developed?](#)
- [What is sexual abuse?](#)
Child sexual abuse within families
Child sexual abuse outside of families
Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)
Child sexual exploitation (CSE)
Contact and non-contact sexual abuse
- [Who abuses children?](#)
- [Why don't children tell about abuse?](#)
- [What can make a child more vulnerable?](#)
- [What are the emotional and behavioural signs of abuse in children?](#)
- [What are the physical signs of abuse in children?](#)
- [The signs of grooming in adults](#)
- [The impact of child sexual abuse](#)
- [Case studies](#)
- [Your role in preventing child sexual abuse](#)
Starting a conversation with parents
SMART rules
Leaving your child with others
Family safety plan
Hopes and fears
Parents Protect learning programme
Engaging with parents
- [Conversation starters for parents to talk to children](#)
Children aged 0-4
Children aged 5-11
Young people aged 12-16
Young people aged 16+
- [How to deal with disclosures](#)
What stops us seeing abuse?
Advice for practitioners – what to do if you need to report abuse
Advice for parents – what to do if you need to report abuse
- [FAQs](#)
- [Help and advice](#)
- [Glossary](#)

Next ▶

About us and this toolkit



Who we are

We are Stop It Now! Wales, part of The Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF), the only UK-wide charity dedicated solely to preventing child sexual abuse.

We work with families and practitioners so that everyone knows how they can play their part to keep children safe. Our confidential Stop It Now! helpline gives advice to anyone with worries about child sexual abuse and how to prevent it.

Our Keeping Children Safe campaign and Early Intervention project work with the public and vulnerable families to help keep children safe.

Like many of our projects, this toolkit has been funded by the Welsh Assembly Government.

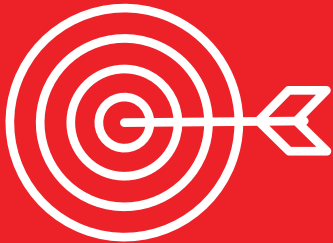
- stopitnow.org.uk/wales
- Stop It Now! helpline – 0808 1000 900

[Next ▶](#)



Our vision

A world in which children's right to live free from sexual abuse and exploitation becomes a reality.



Our mission

To prevent the sexual abuse of children.



Our promise

Child sexual abuse is preventable, not inevitable. So we will work tirelessly to protect all children - by providing direct support to individuals in a position to prevent abuse, including those affected by abuse and those perpetrating it, or at risk of doing so; by sharing our expertise and resources with organisations and governments worldwide to make children safer today; and by driving forward new interventions to protect children against tomorrow's threats.

Our vision, mission and promise

Child sexual abuse is a major public health problem affecting more than a million children under the age of 16 in the UK.

The Covid-19 pandemic increased the risk of harm to some children. That's why we must be stronger, bolder and more innovative to help keep children safe - our skills and our commitment are needed more than ever.

[Next ▶](#)

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is for anyone who works with children and families. We worked closely with practitioners, parents and carers to make it, and it has information, support and advice for people who work in early years, social care, health, schools and education, the police and adult services. It can help you if you work in the statutory, voluntary or independent sectors, and with children and young people whether or not they are living at home.

Our aim is to help practitioners understand the issues around child sexual abuse, providing information support and resources to confidently manage any issues, and to pass on key messages to protect children in the community.

Self-care for practitioners

For practitioners working with children and young people, taking care of ourselves is as important as providing the right support to others. It is very important for professionals to find time to debrief and wind down.

Here are some useful organisations that can help:

[Stopitnow.org.uk](https://www.stopitnow.org.uk)

[NHS.uk](https://www.nhs.uk)

[Mindful.org](https://www.mindful.org)

[Time-To-Change.org.uk](https://www.time-to-change.org.uk)

[Mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)

Next ▶

Children's rights

All children and young people have the right to live their life safe and free from harm. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) is an international agreement which details the rights of all children under the age of eighteen.

Article 34 states that all governments should protect children from sexual abuse, and, in 2011 Wales became the first country to include the UNCRC within its domestic law (the laws made within a specific country). This was seen as a pioneering step by the Welsh Government and showed dedication to the rights of all children in Wales. Children's rights are already protected in Welsh law under the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011.

More information

Children's rights in Wales

gov.wales/childrens-rights-in-wales

UNICEF rights of the child

unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights

Children's Commissioner for Wales

childcomwales.org.uk/uncrc-childrens-rights

Next ►

Why have we made this toolkit?

While there has been an increase in awareness of child sexual abuse and reported cases, many people are still uncomfortable talking about it.

Child sexual abuse is a major public health issue that can't be ignored. Practitioners working with children and families have a vital role to play in keeping children safe.

The true scale of child sexual abuse isn't known, but one major UK study found that one in six young adults said they had been sexually abused before the age of 16.



It is important to help parents and carers understand what they can do to create a safe environment for their children, free of sexual abuse.

We believe that if everyone who works with children and young people had the right knowledge, support and confidence, they would be able to help families in the best way possible.

[Next ▶](#)

What is child sexual abuse?

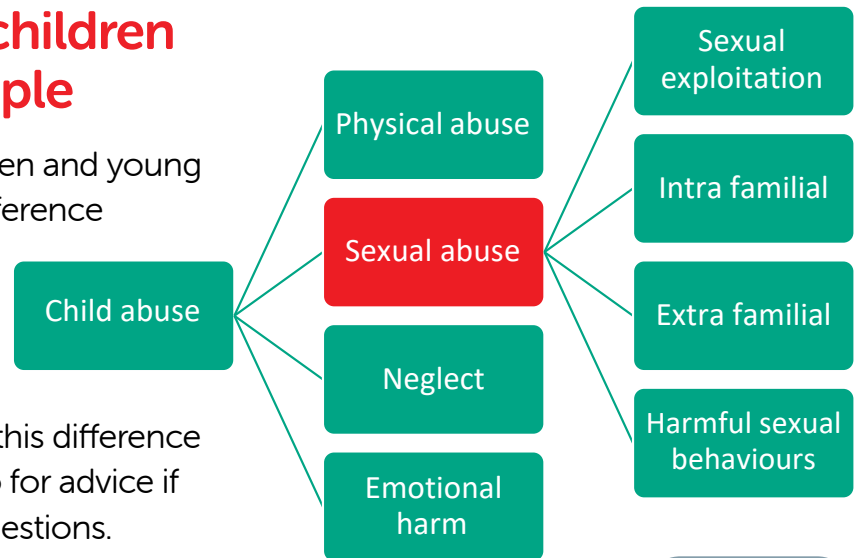


There are different forms of child sexual abuse. It can include:

- forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening
- physical contact, including penetrative or non-penetrative acts
- 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.

Abuse among children and young people

When it comes to children and young people, there's a real difference between normal sexual exploration and abusive behaviour. As child protection practitioners, we need to know what this difference is, and where we can go for advice if we have concerns or questions.



Next ▶

Intra-familial child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse within the family environment is known as intra-familial abuse, but this does not always mean offenders are related to the child. They could be a family friend, foster or adoptive parent, aunt or uncle or someone the child sees as family.

It is difficult to know the full extent of abuse within families, as often victims don't disclose what happened to them. This might be out of fear of not being believed or of the person abusing them, a lack of understanding that what is happening to them is wrong, blaming themselves, protecting siblings or love for the person abusing them.

Abuse within families can be traumatic for children and cause long-term physical and emotional issues, resulting in life-long adverse effects on children. But, this is not always the case.

Extra-familial child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse that happens outside of the family environment is known as extra-familial abuse. This typically happens during adolescent years as a young person meets new people.

Extra-familial abuse can include child sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation. The person sexually abusing them could be someone in a position of trust such as teachers, sports coaches, youth organisation co-ordinators or other people from within our communities. Some people use their position of power to gain advantage or control over children in order to abuse them.

[Next ▶](#)

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)

Around one third of child sexual abuse is carried out by other children and young people. Younger children in particular might engage in harmful sexual behaviours without knowing that it is wrong or abusive, or is doing harm. That's why for under 18s we talk about 'harmful sexual behaviour' rather than 'abuse'.

HSB describes any sexual behaviours that are inappropriate for a child's age and stage of development. It is not always easy to tell the difference between HSB and age-expected sexual behaviours.

Some examples of HSB include:

- frequently and intentionally viewing age-inappropriate sexual material online
- using inappropriate or explicit language
- taking part in sexual activity with peers that they are not ready for
- sending or receiving illegal sexual images
- engaging in abusive or sexually violent behaviour online or offline.

You can find more information in our guide on preventing harmful sexual behaviour.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

CSE happens when an individual or group takes advantage of their power to coerce, manipulate or deceive someone under-18 into sexual activity. A form of exchange takes place between the perpetrator and the child.

The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Sometimes the victim believes they are in a loving relationship or those who are exploiting them are their friends. Often CSE is misunderstood by outsiders and viewed as consensual; victims have sometimes been criminalised for activities they were forced to engage in ([National Action Plan Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse, Welsh Assembly Government - July 2019](#)).

CSE does not always involve physical contact. It can also happen online on social media, gaming sites or messaging apps. This includes creating indecent images or content involving children. Being trafficked for sexual purposes is also a form of CSE.

[Next ▶](#)

Contact and non-contact abuse

Child sexual abuse can be broken down into two types of behaviours:

- **touching behaviours**
(contact abuse)
- **non-touching behaviours**
(non-contact abuse).

Some examples of touching behaviours include:

- touching a child's private parts for sexual pleasure, whether the child is wearing clothes or not
- getting a child to touch someone else's private parts or to masturbate them
- playing sexual games or encouraging a child to take part in sexual activity
- making a child take their clothes off
- having sex (any sexual behaviours that should be happening between two mutually-consenting adults)
- putting body parts (like fingers, tongue or penis) or other objects inside the child's vagina, anus or mouth

Examples of non-touching behaviours include:

- showing sexually explicit material (pornography) to a child
- deliberately exposing an adult's private parts to a child
- encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts or not taking proper measures to prevent a child being exposed to sexual activities by others
- taking, viewing or sharing photographs or films of children in sexual poses (indecent images of children)
- asking a child or young person to share sexual images of themselves
- engaging children in sexually explicit conversations (face to face or online).



Online abuse

Child sexual abuse can also happen online. Online sexual abuse offences include viewing and sharing sexual images of under 18s, having sexual conversations with under 16s and encouraging children to engage in sexual chat or to take sexual images of themselves.

Sexual images of children that appear online are called indecent images of children (IIOC) or child sexual abuse material (CSAM). We avoid using the description “child pornography”.

Other illegal online activity can include adults speaking sexually with children under 16 with or without the intention to meet up and engage in sexual activity (known as grooming).

Our [Parents Protect learning programme](#) can help you and the parents you work with understand more about this.

[Next ▶](#)

Who abuses children?

To keep children safe it is crucial that we face the reality that any child can be sexually abused.

People who sexually abuse children could be anyone. They come from all backgrounds, ethnicities, sexualities, genders, sexes, be married or single. They can be parents, grandparents, family friends or even other young people.

They might abuse children because they want a feeling of power and control. They might know the abuse is wrong and feel unhappy about it. Or they might think their behaviour is okay and shows that they love the child.

Most people who sexually abuse children do not fit the stereotypes. They are often very ordinary, as well as intelligent and sociable. This makes them difficult to recognise. They may abuse their own children, or those within their wider family, the children of friends and neighbours, or children they meet through their jobs or volunteer role.

Many people that sexually abuse children not only build relationships with them but also with their families. They are able to get close to children to have the opportunity to abuse them and to keep a child silenced. This could include offering to babysit for a family, building relationships with a particular child or presenting themselves as a responsible adult to children. The process of building trust with adults in order to harm children is called grooming, and can go on for years before a disclosure is made.

9/10
children who are
sexually abused
know their
abuser

[Next ▶](#)



Why don't children tell about abuse?

Children don't tell about abuse for a variety of reasons. They may be reluctant to talk about any concerns they have about another adult or child's behaviour. This is why it's important that children feel able to talk to a trusted adult in their life.

Children can make disclosures in many different ways, and as practitioners we might notice changes in their behaviour before they say anything. The process of a disclosure can be verbal or non-verbal and happen over a long period of time. It is often a journey, not one act or action. Practitioners and protective adults should always take children seriously when they are trying to share or make sense of their experiences. For more information about dealing with disclosures, [NSPCC have a video resource you can watch](#).

Most of the time the only people who know that sexual abuse has taken place are the victim and the person abusing them. There are rarely any witnesses to speak on behalf of the child.

Next ▶

What stops children from disclosing?

There are many reasons why children don't tell anyone about abuse. They might be dependent on the person abusing them, they might be a close family relative, friend, foster carer, boyfriend or girlfriend. They may be afraid of losing the relationship they have with the person who is sexually abusing them and may feel the need to protect them if they are a family member. For example, a child may really love their grandad, but fear the physical or sexual abuse that happens.

Sometimes children and young people feel like they haven't got anybody they can talk to or they can trust. This could be because of difficulties at home or because the child is socially isolated. They might feel their parents will react badly or that they won't be listened to. Sometimes people who sexually abuse children will threaten a child, or make the child believe they can't trust others or that they won't be believed if they tell.

Children and young people are often embarrassed and can blame themselves for the abuse they have experienced. This embarrassment and guilt often result in the child or young person not wanting their parents to find out and so they don't tell anyone.

People who sexually abuse children might threaten and intimidate the child into silence. If they are threatening to hurt or abuse someone the child loves or respects, the child often keeps quiet to protect them. The person sexually abusing the child may also threaten further harm to them.

Children and young people may not understand what is happening is wrong. Young children or children with a disability or additional needs may have limited understanding.

Children sometimes have difficulties communicating with adults which can make it harder for them to disclose abuse. Children with English as a second language may also face barriers to verbally disclose abuse.

**Children with
a disability are
3 times
more likely
to be sexually abused than
children who don't
have a disability**

[Next ▶](#)

What can make a child more vulnerable?

Children who are sexually abused come from all backgrounds. But some children are more at risk because of previous experiences, their home life or isolation.

There are also other risks to LGBTQ+ children, those from ethnic minority backgrounds or who have learning disabilities.

Leaflets are available for parents/carers and practitioners in English and Welsh, as well as 12 additional languages and easy read versions.

[You can find more information on our website.](#)



What are the emotional and behavioural signs of abuse in children?

Child sexual abuse is particularly difficult and uncomfortable for anybody to think about, but as professionals, it is important to recognise the warning signs. This will help prepare you and give you the tools to educate parents.

Emotional and behavioural signs that a child may have been sexually abused can include:

- an unexpected change in behaviour or personality
- regressive behaviours such as bed-wetting
- nightmares or trouble sleeping
- acting out in sexual ways with toys or objects
- becoming withdrawn, depressed, anxious or very clingy
- inappropriately affectionate
- unaccountable fear of particular people or places
- outbursts of anger
- becoming secretive
- changes in eating habits (over eating or under eating)
- use of drugs or alcohol
- showing sexual awareness inappropriate to their age
- unexplained money or gifts

What are the physical signs of abuse in children?

As well as emotional and behavioural signs, there are physical signs to be aware of in children. This may be uncomfortable and distressing to read, so make sure you take care of your own wellbeing.

- Unexplained signs of trauma in the child's private body areas or parts, mouth area (bruising, bleeding, swelling, sores, infection)
- Difficulty walking, standing or sitting
- Bedwetting or soiling themselves
- Poor personal hygiene or excessive bathing
- Physical pain or itching in the genital area
- Pregnancy
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Disturbed sleep
- Recurring physical ailments
- Other visible bruising or cuts on arms, legs or face
- Self-harming or body dysmorphia

These lists should be used with care. Although these are all signs that sexual abuse may be happening, there could be other reasons for these behavioural or physical changes. However, if you notice a combination of worrying signs, it may be time to seek help or advice.

[You can find more information on warning signs on our Parents Protect website.](#)

Next ▶

Signs of grooming in adults

There may be a concern about the behaviour of an adult, if they:

- **insist on physical affection or physical play with a child**
–kissing, hugging, wrestling
- **give excessive gifts to the child**
- **take photographs or keep mementos of other children**
- **talk about sex frequently, tell sexual jokes and has inappropriate conversations in the presence of children**
- **single out and give special attention to one child**
- **seek to be, or is often, alone with a child in a house, car or room**
- **display child-orientated behaviours or engages in childlike behaviour**
- **are overly interested in a child's personal development**
- **refuses to allow a child privacy or to make their own decisions on personal matters.**

None of these signs are proof that an adult is committing sexual abuse so it is important to use them with care. Some of the grooming behaviours can look like kind and genuine behaviours from an adult towards a child, such as gift giving or praise and rewards, which makes them difficult to distinguish. However, we know that there is often a "threshold" in behaviours.

But there is often a threshold - some behaviours will be normal, healthy and appropriate and others will cause a gut feeling that something isn't right.

Don't ignore a gut feeling - speaking up and looking for advice or support can help protect children.

If you have concerns, always follow your own organisations safeguarding and reporting policies. If you are concerned about another adult's behaviour then you can contact our confidential Stop It Now! helpline for advice.

**Don't
ignore
your gut
feeling**

Next ▶



The impact of child sexual abuse

Adverse childhood experiences are traumatic events, particularly those in early childhood, that significantly affect the health and well-being of people. These experiences range from being raised in a household where domestic violence, alcohol abuse, parental separation or drug abuse is present, to suffering verbal, mental, physical or sexual abuse. (Public Health Wales, 2015).

phw.nhs.wales/topics/adverse-childhood-experiences

Child sexual abuse affects different children in different ways. For some children the impact isn't immediately clear. Other children display a range of emotions and behaviours. Abuse can have lasting and damaging effects on some children. However, children who experience abuse but are made safe and supported by protective adults can, and do, go on to recover and lead normal, happy and fulfilled lives. Children who experience trauma aren't always traumatised.

However, moving into adulthood some people struggle to form healthy relationships and suffer mental and physical health difficulties. How a child copes with sexual abuse depends on them being believed, heard, and receiving support from family or friends and access to services.

Next ▶

Some of the effects that children and adults can experience following abuse include:

- anger issues
- anxiety or depression
- low self-esteem
- eating disorders
- self-harming
- suicidal thoughts
- worrying that the person abusing them is still a threat to themselves or others
- learning difficulties or lower educational attainment, difficulties in communicating
- displaying obsessive behaviours (ocd)
- poor general physical health
- post-traumatic stress disorder (ptsd)
- drug or alcohol dependency
- disturbing thoughts (feelings triggered by new events) with memories that can cause distress or confusion
- struggling with parenting
- trouble developing healthy and positive relationships as an adult
- behavioural problems including anti-social behaviour and criminal behaviour.



Next ▶

Case studies

**1**

A parent shares with you that her six-year-old child has been sexually abused by an older cousin who is 12-years-old.

This has already been reported to the police and an investigation is ongoing. The parent is struggling with her own feelings and worried about her child, how he will be affected by what happened and how best to help him.

Suggested advice: You should reassure the parent that it is perfectly normal to feel worried or angry in this situation. Many children experience sexual abuse and have no short-term or long-term negative consequences. Children recover best if they see their parent coping well, so they need protecting from any signs of parental distress.

Stop It Now! Wales has a [guide](#) to support parents and carers of children or young people who have experienced abuse and guide them through the investigation process. This parent might benefit from calling the Stop It Now! helpline, to provide her with information, support and reassurance, both now and into the future. You could suggest that the parent has an open conversation with her child around respectful and safe boundaries, perhaps using the [NSPCC PANTS](#) rule to help with this conversation. It is important that the parent feels supported emotionally in this situation, as that will help her child's recovery.

Next ►

2

A parent raises a worry with you that her 15-year-old son is looking at adult pornography online and has sent a sexual image to a peer.

This had already been brought to the attention of school, who notified the police. The boy received advice from the police regarding this behaviour. The parent is looking for help and support to be able to understand the behaviour and also to be better equipped to have difficult conversations about sex and relationship education and about viewing pornography.

Suggested advice: This will be a worrying time for the parent and it is great that they are seeking advice and support. These are issues that need addressing and not ignoring, however awkward or embarrassing it may feel. It is positive that the school and police are already aware and that the police have spoken to the boy. It is important that the parent understands from their son what advice the police have given, so it can be reinforced at home.

You could encourage the parent to visit the [Parents Protect website to look at 'What's the Problem'](#), a guide for parents and carers of children and young people who have got into trouble online. It tries to answer some of the immediate questions parents may have after discovering problems in their child's online life. It also has helpful information, advice and discussion ideas for talking to young people about pornography. There are also links to other organisations, including Family Lives, which provides information about teenagers and pornography; Internet Matters has credible advice for parents and carers on children's online safety, and BISH UK, a guide to healthy sex and love for anyone over 14.

The experienced advisors on the Stop It Now! helpline can also help parents and professionals in this situation. It is a safe and confidential place for adults to call and discuss any worries, and you don't have to give them your real name or any contact details.

Next ►

3

A parent of three children (4, 9 and 11 years old) is worried that some of their play behaviour isn't age-appropriate.

The parent is unsure about what behaviours are and are not age-appropriate for her different children. The 9 and 11-year-old have more sexual awareness than the 4-year-old and have been overheard using rude words and engaging in roleplay games.

Suggested advice: The parent should be praised for seeking help and advice from you. The Parents Protect [traffic light tool](#) will help in this situation. These resources give guidance and information to help understand the difference between healthy and developmentally-expected sexual exploration and play in children of different ages and behaviours that are not appropriate and can harm others or themselves. You could use the traffic light leaflets to start a conversation about what worrying behaviours the parent has seen in their children and how they could respond in future.

Many families have these concerns and so it might be useful for the parent to share the traffic light leaflets with family and friends.

Next ▶

4

The mother of a four-year-old boy tells you that her partner has been convicted of viewing extreme pornography and sexual images of children.

He has received a two-year suspended prison sentence and placed on the sex offenders register for ten years. He is also meeting with his probation officer on a weekly basis. The parents are not able to live together right now, but the mother is worried about the impact the conviction is having on her and her child.

Suggested advice: Discovering that a loved one has been viewing sexual images of children can be distressing and confusing, and often leaves those affected feeling incredibly isolated or even traumatised. You should advise the parent to contact the Stop It Now! helpline where they can get confidential support from experienced advisors who speak to hundreds of people in this position each year. You could also show them the [Stop It Now! website](#), which has a vital information for people in this situation, and hosts a [forum](#) for families affected by the arrest of a loved one for their offending behaviour.

It is great that the parent sought your support with this sensitive situation. There will likely be a number of challenges and dilemmas to face over the weeks and months ahead, and it is best if places of ongoing support can be identified now.

It is important that the parent feels supported emotionally in this situation, both to meet her own needs but also to help her son to thrive. In these circumstances you could also consider a referral into the [Stop It Now! Wales](#) Early Intervention programme.

Next ▶

Your role in prevention



Starting the conversation with parents

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a topic that most people would rather not think about, let alone talk about. Our long experience in this area tells us many of the parents you encounter will have little or no knowledge of child sexual abuse and may well be reluctant to engage. It will be a challenge to get parents comfortable enough just to talk about it, but it's important that you do. In turn they can talk to their children.

Here are some conversation starters and resources to try using with parents:

SMART rules

The best way to protect children from sexual abuse is to talk about it. Make parents and carers aware that sexual abuse thrives on secrecy. The more it's spoken about the better protected children will be.

To open up the conversation you could use our [SMART rules cards](#). SMART is an acronym for Secrecy, Monitor, Attention, Respect, Talk. Looking through a resource together and discussing it in a relaxed and casual setting may help parents and carers become more open to discussing CSA.

There are also SMART rules to use with children. These could be given to parents to encourage them to talk to their children.

[Next ▶](#)

Leaving your child with others

It's really important to communicate to parents that they should be cautious about who they leave their children with. Talking to parents about their own wider family as part of their safety networks along with trusted organisations can be helpful.

This will be different for foster carers as they will be limited to nominated carers or other people and organisations approved by Children's Services, supervising social workers and the child's social worker.

Talk to parents about how to research appropriate childcare facilities and the importance of full DBS checks. In family or social situations parents should be aware that because sexual abuse often isn't reported, a DBS check will offer very limited information. Encourage parents to ask to see safeguarding policies for groups or organisations they use for childcare.

Encourage those parents who use informal childcare within their family or friend network, to set appropriate boundaries and expectations with those who are looking after their children. If parents are leaving their child with

another family member or friend, then it is important to remind them to ensure that their children know how to say 'no' to any activities they don't like or that make them feel uncomfortable, and that they can speak out if they have any worries.

Family safety plan

Helping families create a family safety plan can get the conversation flowing. Our guide shows how to create one and outlines the importance of discussing and identifying risk factors. You could start by giving an example - the internet is always a good place to start. Talk to parents about the positives - as well as the risks - of the internet.

You can then move on to discuss other risk factors. Encourage parents to involve the whole family and work together. This will open up the lines of communication between parents and their children.

More information about developing a family safety plan can be found here:

parentsprotect.co.uk/create-a-family-safety-plan.htm

Next ▶

Hopes and fears

Talk to parents about their hopes for their children and what their fears are. You can use our family safety plan template to make notes together.

Discussing a parent's fears will naturally lead into other conversations. We would recommend treading lightly with this technique and perhaps revisiting it over more than one occasion if necessary.

Parents Protect learning programme

Our series of films aim to inform adults about how and why child sexual abuse happens, how to prevent harm from happening in the first place, and where to get help if something has already happened. All videos are available in English and Welsh.

You can signpost parents to them, or watch them together: parentsprotect.co.uk/sexual-abuse-learning-programme.htm

Engaging with parents

Many parents will be reluctant to engage in conversations about CSA. Some adults don't understand the facts around CSA and believe in the common misconceptions. Your role as a professional is to remove the stigma around the subject, help parents understand risk and share preventative information to increase protection.

In your role you should have a professional curiosity about a family's circumstances. If a parent is reluctant to talk then keep trying and monitor the situation. You may want to continue to revisit the conversation with a parent. If you have any worries or concerns about a family, you should use your organisation's safeguarding process. You can also seek help and advice from the Stop It Now! helpline: 0808 1000 900.



Conversation starters for parents to use with children

It can be really tough knowing how to talk to children, and when it comes to having difficult and uncomfortable conversations, it can be daunting knowing where to start. However, it is really important that children know they can talk to the trusted adults in their life. Professionals and parents alike need to know how to keep the lines of communication open. By providing children with the knowledge they need, they can become empowered and confident in taking charge of their bodies. Talking to children allows them to talk, too.

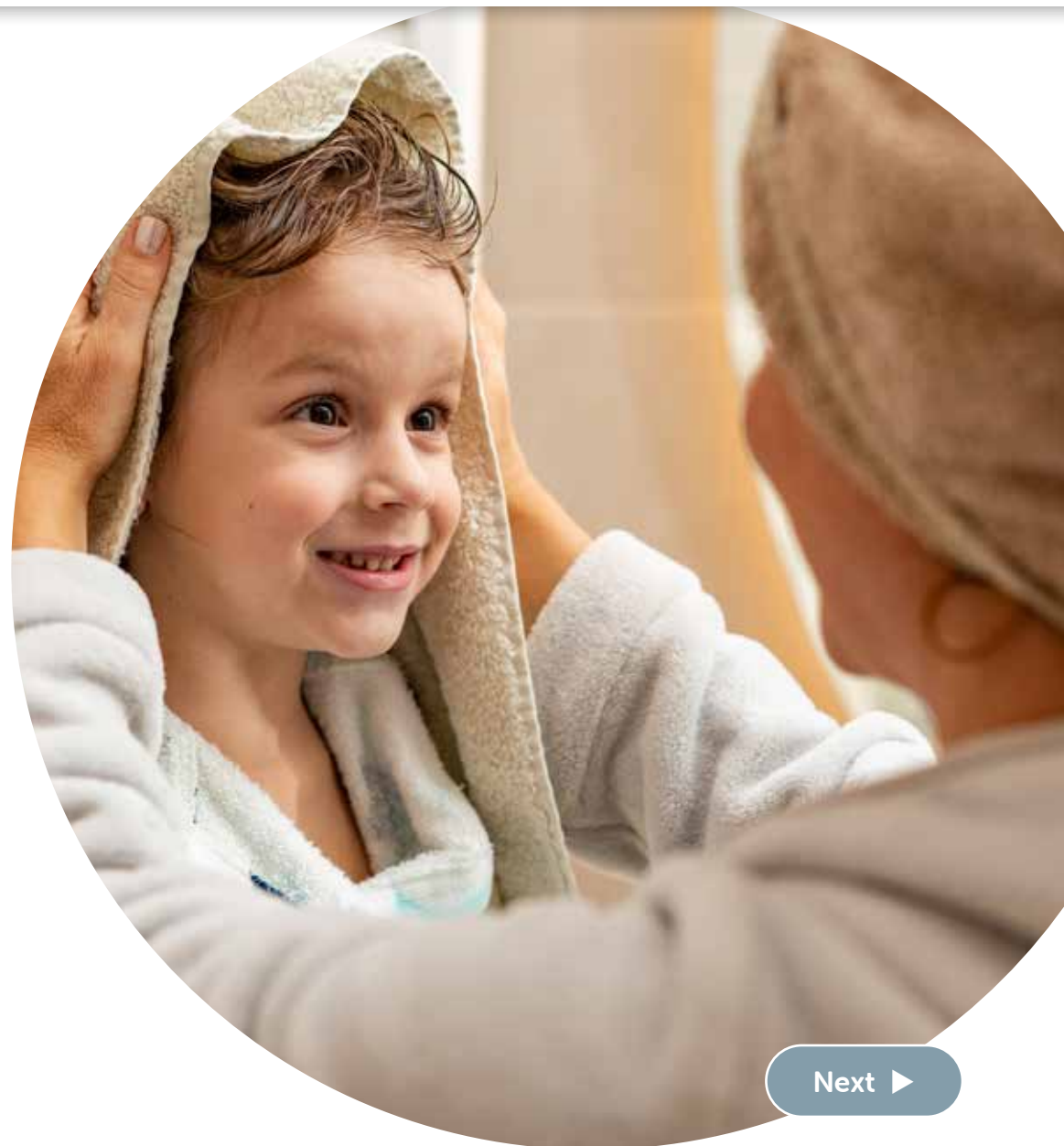
In this section you will find age-appropriate conversation starters and examples of naturally occurring moments for parents and carers to use with their children. These will help you engage with parents and provide much-needed support.

[Next ▶](#)

Children aged 0-4

Talking with children under four can be particularly hard. They are young and may not have the understanding you feel is necessary to deal with the topic of sexual abuse. However, using these conversation starters at an appropriate time, opens up communication in a suitable way:

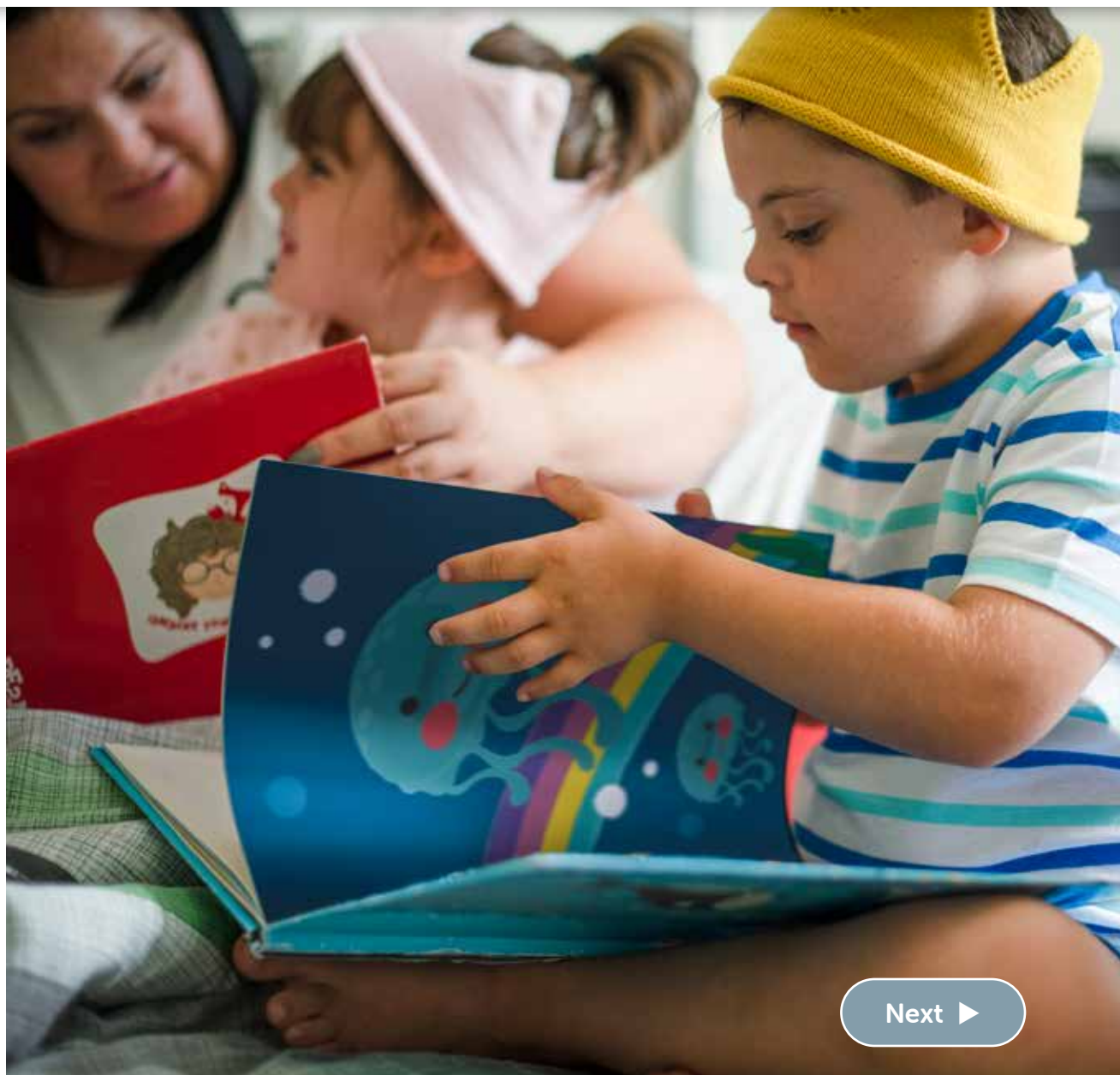
- **Bath or shower time** – This is a perfect opportunity to discuss body parts and private areas. We recommend that from birth you use the correct names for body parts and not nicknames. You could progress on to talking about areas of the body that are 'no touch' zones or 'private' parts. You could use bath crayons to draw a silhouette of a child and show or ask the child to identify areas that belong to them. You could then ask the child where those areas are on their own bodies.
- **Toileting and nappy changing times** – This is a naturally occurring opportunity to start a conversation about consent. It can be useful to ask permission of a child, even when they are very young, to change their nappy or give them help to use toilet. This can also apply to any other personal care that children may need.



Next ▶

- **Bedtime with a book** – Young children love to read at bedtime. It is a positive experience which promotes attachment and relaxation. That means it is an ideal time to read a book with them such as “An Exceptional Children’s Guide to Teach” (3-10 years) or “It’s My Body” (3-6 years). Children are naturally inquisitive and so reading a book about positive touch will open up the opportunity for answering questions. You can use the book to help answer your child’s questions.
- **Talk about what your child is curious about** – Young children are naturally explorative and curious about their body and the differences between sexes. They will have questions about why they look different so don’t be afraid to answer them. If you feel uncomfortable about this, you can approach it with your child “to learn together” by looking at a book or a resource that can explain.

A list of books to read with children can be found here: parentsprotect.co.uk/books-to-read-with-children-to-help-prevent-sexual-abuse.htm



Children aged 5 – 11

Using a subtle approach to talk to children allows parents to open up more conversations. Forcing children to talk may well have the opposite effect. Children in this age group are starting to become more aware of their own body and paying more attention to the world around them. They are also more likely to stop talking if they feel uncomfortable with a conversation. The advice below regarding talking to children can be shared directly with parents and carers.

- **On the way home from school** – Children differ, but many are talkative and inquisitive while walking or driving home from school. This is an ideal time to approach the topic of keeping themselves safe. Using the words 'sexual abuse' isn't necessary. Times when there is limited eye contact can allow children to be more relaxed and talk about difficult topics, such as being side by side walking or in the car.
- **Find similar examples** – You could start by asking your child how to safely cross the road, and then lead the conversation into other ways of keeping safe. For example, how to keep safe from strangers, games they don't like with other children, anybody touching them if they are uncomfortable. Also talk to your child about saying "no".

Teaching children that it is ok to say "no" to anybody touching them – even if it's someone they love or feel close to - is so important.

- **Identify safe people** – A child friendly activity is to draw around their hand and use each of the finger and thumb spaces to name safe and trusted people that your child can identify with when they are worried or scared about anything. Children choosing people from different situations can offer a good level of support in many environments, such as family and school.
- **Talk about their fears** – Talking to children about things that scare or worry them is a good thing. It opens the lines of communication between you and your children. Open discussions enable a child to have a voice and not be afraid to use it.

Children may choose to talk about issues that may seem trivial to you, but to your child they could be really important. It means that they know they can talk to you should they have any worry or concerns, including abuse.



‘Worry monsters’, ‘worry journals’ or a ‘worry jar’ are great tools to use with children, too. A worry monster, usually a soft toy, is used to help children with their fears. You can sit with your child and talk about what worries them then write it down and ‘feed’ it to the monster. Worry journals can be used for writing down fears, worries and positives, too. They contain activities for parents and children to do together. For some children it is easy to write or draw a picture to share with you about what worries them. The ‘worry jar’ can contain the worry and keep it away from a child.

It’s important to talk to your child about who they can turn to should they feel unsafe. Making positive associations about the police, teachers and other professionals is also important. If a child feels unsafe they should feel able to ‘tell’.

Using age specific books such as “My Body Belongs to Me” (3-10 years) or “The Huge Bag of Worries” (5-10 years) are also a good way of opening up conversations about body safety and empowerment.

- **Singing along with ‘Pantosaurus’** – The Pantosaurus resources, including a song with simple lyrics that you and your child can sing along with, and a resources pack, provide ample opportunity for conversations and provide support for parents, too. You could start by telling your child they are going to learn with Pantosaurus. They can then play the song, dance and then talk about what the song is about. You could read the posters to your child and put them up as a reminder.

Find Pantosaurus here: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/pants-underwear-rule>

Next ▶

Young people aged 12 – 16

Teenagers can be tricky to talk to. They are going through so many changes, so talking to their parents may be the last thing they want to do. However, it is important to keep those lines of communication open. Talking with teenagers will require a different approach to talking with younger children.

- **Talk about sex** – Talking about sex can be awkward and uncomfortable for parents and children, but it's important pre-teens and teenagers know about sex and what a normal, healthy sexual relationship is. Look for a naturally occurring opportunity for a discussion to present itself. We recommend that parents talk about sex with their children a little at a time and as often as possible. A natural way to do this would be to talk to your young person about age-related physical changes to their bodies and what they can expect to happen or how they may feel. For example, talking your daughter about menstruation and what to expect. Similarly, having a conversation with your son about what changes he can expect to his body, talking about erections will open up the lines of communication for you to discuss the importance of safe sex and consent.

- **Watching television** – Sometimes it is easier to broach a subject when your child is relaxed and watching television. We recommend choosing your time carefully, though! You might want to think about referring to a current storyline of abuse while watching a soap opera or choose an episode of a show that has a storyline which allows for conversation. Alternatively, you might want to look at podcasts, music (song lyrics can open up lots of topics for conversation) or social media to find your hook.
- **Answer their questions honestly** – Often teenagers will use the internet, their friends or pornography to answer their questions about sex. However, if parents can ensure the lines of communication are always open – that it's always okay to ask any question - then they can decide to ask you. Being open and not making a big deal of any subject can help ensure your child will talk to you. If they have a question, you should answer it as best you can or research it together.
- **If at first you don't succeed...** – keep trying! Teenagers can be reluctant to talk to their parents about everything, but it's important they know they can turn to you about absolutely anything. Children need to know that they are going to be listened to without judgement.

Next ▶

Young people aged 16+

This can be a difficult age to communicate with. Young people are at an age where they are more grown-up but not yet adults. Many young people over 16 won't see the risk in many situations or will become reluctant to talk to their parents.

- **Be open and honest** – Most young adults will appreciate their parents being open and honest about their own experiences, as well as being open about difficult situations. This might be difficult for parents, but it's important to remember that young people are only just finding their way in the world and still need, and very often want, help and guidance. Parents should be aware that their young person might not want to open up themselves at first, but with time and a relaxed approach, they soon will.
- **Treat them as a young adult** – Sometimes when a young person chooses not to open up it is because they feel like they are being treated as a child. To most parents, treating their 16-year-old as a young adult might seem daunting, because in their eyes they are still a child. However, by trusting their young person and allowing them to feel respected, parents will see that they will open up to them more.

- **Empower them** – Let your young person know that it is okay to say “no” and that they do not need to do anything they don't want to. Discuss peer pressure and their rights to be in charge of their own bodies. Young people may experiment sexually as they grow up, but providing them with the tools to make informed decisions and the knowledge that they can confide in you is essential to their emotional and social wellbeing.
- **Understanding consent** – It is a parent's responsibility to have a conversation about sexual relationships and consent issues with their young person. It is vital that all young people fully understand the law in relation to sexual relationships. When young people are entering into sexual relationships they should be clear about boundaries and the decisions they take. You can find out more on the Parents Protect website.
- **Listen without judgement** – Young people often don't confide in their parents because they are afraid of being judged. Listening is just as important as talking with young people. Sometimes sitting quietly while a young person offloads can be just as effective as giving advice.

Next ▶

How to deal with disclosures of child sexual abuse

What stops us seeing abuse?

Many people have experienced someone close to them abusing a child. When something is so difficult to think about, it is only human to find ways of denying it to ourselves. One of the common thoughts that parents in this situation have is: 'My child would have told me if they were being abused and they haven't - so it can't be happening'.

Here are some examples of the types of things people say to themselves to deny what is happening:

He was the perfect father; he was involved with the children, he played with them and when our daughter was ill he looked after her so well.

I thought they were just fooling around. He couldn't be abusing anyone at 14.

My brother would never do that to a child. He has a wife and children.

My friend has had a longstanding relationship with a woman. So how can he be interested in boys?

He told me about his past right from the start. He wouldn't have done that if he hadn't changed and I'd know if he'd done it again.

She was their mother; how could she be abusing them?

Next ▶

Advice for professionals: what to do if you need to report abuse

As a professional, if you have a concern about child sexual abuse you should follow your own organisation's policy and procedures for safeguarding and child protection. Under the Wales Safeguarding Procedures should a parent or other individual share any concern with you regarding any type of abuse (abuse of a child or an adult) you have a statutory responsibility under the procedures to report this information direct to your local social services. It is not a matter of personal choice to report or not report.

Advice about where to report is within the procedures: safeguarding.wales.

The new procedures (2020) are also available to download as an app.



Advice for parents: what to do if you need to report abuse

There are a number of ways you can report abuse. The [Parents Protect learning videos](#) can help you understand what actions you need to take.

You need to respond with care and urgency if you think a child is trying to tell you about something that has happened, you should react quickly and with care.

- **Believe the child** - if a child trusts you enough to tell you about abuse, you must remember that they rarely lie about such things.
- **Be supportive** - it is important that they feel supported - don't dismiss their claims or put them off talking about it.
- **Stay calm** - if they are talking to you about it, don't get angry or upset. If you get angry the child might think you are going to punish them. This will play into the hands of the person who sexually abused the child, who might have warned the child not to tell.

- **Be caring** - make sure the child knows you love them and that they have done nothing wrong - and keep telling 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 and protect the child from any further contact with the person who committed the abuse.
- **Re-establish safety** - to keep your child safe you can put into place a family safety plan.
- **Get help** – get help from professionals who can help guide you towards safety and healing. Information on where to get help can be found on our Parents Protect website.
- **Do not despair** - children can and do recover from child sexual abuse. It is very difficult to hear that someone you love has been hurt in such a way but help to recover is available.
- **Call 0808 1000 900 for anonymous support** or visit stopitnow.org.uk/helpline to get in touch online.

FAQ's

What is the sex offenders register?

Registered sexual offenders are required to notify the police of their ID, address and other personal details.

The length of time an offender is required to register with police is set by the court. It can be any period between 12 months and life, depending on the age of the offender, the age of the victim, the nature of the offence and the sentence the offender receives.

For more information about registration requirements: hub.unlock.org.uk

Who monitors sex offenders in the community?

By law, the police service, the prison service and the probation service have to work together, sharing information to manage known offenders. These arrangements are known as Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). The process is supported by various other agencies, including: Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) and the NHS, which are also required to provide information about these offenders.

MAPPA is responsible for:

- identifying who may pose a risk of harm
- sharing relevant information about them
- assessing the nature and extent of that risk
- managing the risk effectively, protecting victims and reducing further harm.

[Next ▶](#)



What can I do if I have concerns about an adult?

There are circumstances where you can ask for specific information regarding a named individual through the Child Sex Offenders Disclosure Scheme. This is sometimes known as “Sarah’s Law”. This scheme allows parents, carers or guardians to formally ask the police for information about a person who has contact with their child, or a child close to them, if they’re concerned the person may pose a risk.

When managing the individual’s risk, it may also be considered necessary for information about offenders to be disclosed directly to others by the police in order to prevent harm. This may include new partners, landlords or school headteachers. Information is not disclosed to the public unless they are in a position to better monitor and manage the offender, or unless they are themselves potentially at risk. For more information on this, visit the Stop It Now! website.

Next ▶

Help and advice

What help is there for victims of child sexual abuse?

There are a number of organisations that can support families who experience child sexual abuse. These organisations are able to assist those looking for help, support or information.

MOSAC

Mothers of Sexually Abused Children (MOSAC) is a voluntary organisation supporting non-abusing parents and carers whose children have been sexually abused. They provide advocacy, advice and information, befriending, counselling, play therapy and support groups following alleged child sexual abuse.

Visit mosac.org.uk for more information or call their national helpline on 0800 980 1958.

NAPAC

NAPAC is the National Association for People Abused in Childhood. It is a registered charity providing support and information for people abused in childhood.

Visit napac.org.uk. Through NAPAC you can also find local services.

SURVIVORS UK

Provides information, support and counselling for men and boys who have been raped or sexually abused.

Visit survivorsuk.org or call their national helpline on 0845 1221201.

[Next ▶](#)

HSB toolkit

This toolkit is designed for parents, carers, family members and professionals, to help everyone play their part in keeping children safe.

It has links to useful information, resources and support, as well as practical tips to prevent harmful sexual behaviour and provide safe environments for families.



What's the problem?

This is a guide for parents of children and young people who have got into trouble online. It is designed to answer some of the immediate questions you may have after learning that something is happening or has happened in your child's online life.

Both these resources can be found on the Stop It Now! website and are available in English and Welsh.

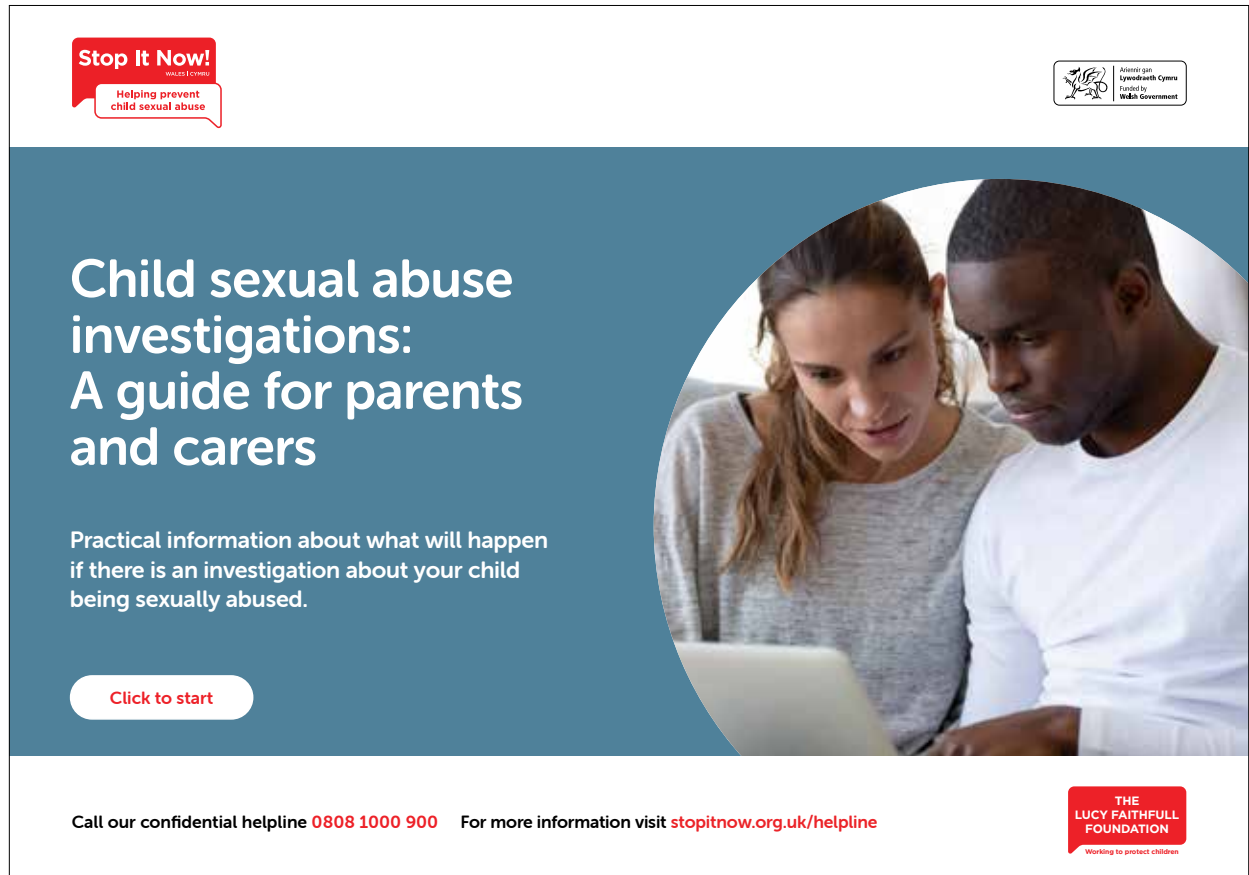
Next ▶

Child sexual abuse investigations: a guide for parents and carers

As a professional, a family may seek your advice and support if they are dealing with a child sexual abuse disclosure. Many parents and carers have feelings of shock, confusion, anger or fear after they find out that their child may have been sexually abused.

This guide has been developed to give parents and carers practical information about what will happen if there is an investigation about their child being sexually abused. It contains advice on supporting children, the process surrounding medical examinations, and prosecution, including where the police or Crown Prosecution Service decide not to proceed.

The guide can be found on the Stop It Now! website and is available in English and Welsh.



Stop It Now!
WALES | CYMRU
Helping prevent
child sexual abuse

Almudi gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

Child sexual abuse investigations: A guide for parents and carers

Practical information about what will happen if there is an investigation about your child being sexually abused.

[Click to start](#)

Call our confidential helpline **0808 1000 900** For more information visit stopitnow.org.uk/helpline

THE LUCY FAITHFULL FOUNDATION
Working to protect children

Next ▶

Where can I get further advice?

If you are worried about someone's behaviour towards a child, you can:

- contact your local police
- contact your local Children's Services office or team
- contact the confidential Stop It Now! helpline
- contact the NSPCC helpline
- report online to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre ceop.police.uk/ceop-reporting

Local police

If a child is in immediate danger, call 999. If not, all police forces have other ways in which you can get in touch, including a non-emergency phone number which you will find in a telephone directory or online.

You can get in contact with your local police team:

Dyfed Powys Police dyfed-powys.police.uk/en/contact-us/report-an-incident

Gwent Police gwent.police.uk/ro/report/ocr/af/how-to-report-a-crime

North Wales Police north-wales.police.uk/contact

South Wales Police south-wales.police.uk/ro/report/ocr/af/how-to-report-a-crime/

Next ▶

Children's Social Care

You can also get in touch with your local Children's Social Care team. Finding and contacting your local social services: 111.wales.nhs.uk/LocalServices/?s=SocialService

The confidential Stop It Now! helpline

If you'd like to talk through any concerns or get more information or advice for a case, you can speak to the experienced advisors on our confidential Stop It Now! helpline.

Call 0808 1000 900 for anonymous support or visit stopitnow.org.uk/helpline to get in touch online.

Stop It Now! Wales

You can find more information about what happens after you make a disclosure of abuse on the Stop It Now! Wales website.

stopitnow.org.uk/wales

Parents Protect

Our website has advice and information for parents, carers and professionals who want to know more about how they can prevent child sexual abuse.

It has more information on the areas included in this leaflet and short films to help you understand the risks and how to protect children offline and online. These are available in English and Welsh.

parentsprotect.co.uk

NSPCC

The NSPCC is the UK's leading charity dedicated to stopping child abuse. You can contact their child protection helpline on: **0808 800 5000** or via email at help@nspcc.org.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' to find the information in different languages.

Next ▶

CEOP

If you are you worried about online sexual abuse or the way someone has been communicating with you or your child online, make a report to one of CEOP's child protection advisors. You will find help and support by reporting inappropriate contact online.

ceop.police.uk/safety-centre

Thinkuknow

Thinkuknow is an educational programme from NCA-CEOP, a UK organisation which protects children both online and offline. Their website has useful resources for parents and young people about internet safety.

thinkuknow.co.uk

The Wales safeguarding procedures

safeguarding.wales

If a child is in immediate danger call the police on 999.

You can also find contact details for your local Children's Services by searching online.

For more FAQ's visit parentsprotect.co.uk/faqs.htm

EYST Wales

EYST Wales was set up to support ethnic minority young people, their families and communities in Wales. The organisation aims to provide culturally sensitive support services to its target group.

eyst.org.uk

01792 466 980

info@eyst.org.uk

Mencap

You can speak to the Mencap helpline by calling **0808 8000 300** or searching online.

Stonewall Cymru

Stonewall Cymru wants to shape a Wales where people are free to be themselves, organisations help drive change, public attitudes improve, prejudice is challenged, and laws protect LGBTQ+ people. Its website has advice, support and information, including on coming out.

stonewall.cymru

Learning Disability Wales

Learning Disability Wales wants all people with a learning disability to live as independently as possible and to have control over their own lives.

ldw.org.uk

MOSAC

MOSAC supports the non-abusing parents and carers of children who have been sexually abused. Its goal is to provide them with the help that they need to move on positively with their lives.

mosac.org.uk

Next ▶

Glossary

Abuser - a person who commits sexual, physical or emotional harm to a child, often repeatedly or regularly.

ACE – acronym for adverse childhood experience. ACE's are stressful events occurring in childhood. These may include sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional harm or neglect, domestic violence, substance misuse, divorce or mental health conditions.

Additional needs – health or developmental condition that can affect everyday life. Additional needs can be developmental, physical, learning, behavioural or sensory.

Child – a person who is under the age of eighteen.

Child sexual abuse (CSA) - this is when a child is forced or persuaded to engage in sexual activities online or offline.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) - sexual exploitation is the coercion or manipulation of children or adults at risk into taking part in sexual activities which can involve some form of financial exchange.

Duty to report - for the purposes of this booklet, a duty to report to the local authority will be taken to mean a referral to social services who, alongside the police, have statutory powers to investigate suspected abuse or neglect. Concerns about abuse and neglect may be present when a child or adult at risk is already known to Social Services. Do not presume because they are known that there is no need to report. Always report your concerns.

Disability - a physical, mental or learning condition that limits a person's movements, senses or activities.

Disclosure - telling somebody a secret or information that was not known before. We use this word to describe what happens when a child tells you about CSA.

Environment – the surroundings in which a child learns, grows and plays. Including the people around them. The environment can influence young people's mental and emotional health as well as physical well-being.

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) - this is used to describe any sexual behaviours which are deemed inappropriate for a child's age and stage of development.

[Next ▶](#)

Indecent images of children (IIOC) – this is any photographic or video content that depicts a child or young person in a sexual way.

MAPPA - Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements is the process through which criminal justice agencies work together with other relevant agencies to protect the public by managing the risks posed by violent and sexual offenders living in the community

Peer - a group of people who have similar interests, age, background, or social status. The members of this group are likely to influence the beliefs and behaviour of others in the group.

Pre-pubescent - the period of development immediately preceding puberty when they develop sexual characteristics, which usually includes children up to about 11 years old.

Post-pubescent – the period when a child is at the stage in life when they are developing from a child into an adult and becoming able to have children.

Referral - for the purposes of these procedures a report to social services will be taken to also mean a referral.

Young people - the time between childhood and adulthood. People from 13 to 18 years of age are generally referred to as young people.

For more information please contact:

Stop It Now! Cymru

c/o NSPCC Cymru Wales, Diane Engelhardt House,
(Unit 2) Treglown Court, Dowlais Road, Cardiff, CF24 5LQ

Confidential helpline: 0808 1000 900

stopitnow.org.uk/wales

parentsprotect.co.uk

lucyfaithfull.org.uk

 facebook.com/stopitnowUKandireland

 [@StopItNowWales](https://twitter.com/StopItNowWales)

 [The Lucy Faithfull Foundation](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-lucy-faithfull-foundation/)

 wales@stopitnow.org.uk

We would like to give special thanks to the parents, carers and professionals that have worked with Stop It Now! Wales for their input into the development of the toolkit.

We would also like to thank Welsh Government for their continued support.



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation is a registered Charity No. 1013025, and is a company limited by guarantee. Registered in England No. 2729957. Registered office: 2 Birch House, Harris Business Park, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove, B60 4DJ.

Important note: The photographic content within this document is for illustrative purposes only. All persons featured are models @ iStock and Shutterstock.

**THE
LUCY FAITHFULL
FOUNDATION**

Working to protect children