

No.3 Child Sexual Abuse

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

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 (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Many victims of sexual abuse in the family will never tell – they may be worried about the impact telling will have on other family members, they may be fearful that they won't be believed, and they may also be worried about what will happen next if they ask for help. It is important to remember that it is not necessary to have a disclosure for professionals to consider the possibility that a child may have been sexually abused.

The judgement about levels of intervention will as always be based on concerns about significant harm. However, there is no 'mild' or 'acceptable' level of sexual abuse that might make it manageable within early help or even universal services - nearly all sexual abuse referrals will require a social care -led intervention.

As with all safeguarding and child protection concerns, refer to the DSCB Threshold Tool, available at <http://www.devonsafeguardingchildren.org/workers-volunteers/early-help/> and consult your Designated Safeguarding Lead before making a referral.

No disclosure is necessary to raise a concern about potential sexual abuse.

- Family background – have there been concerns / questions about potential sexual abuse?
- Do not allow a child / adult's level of learning disability / difficulty to distract from a sexual abuse hypothesis – these children are often more vulnerable, especially physically/cognitively disabled children that require intimate care.
- Children may be sexually abused by adults and/or peers.
- Children who are identified as possible perpetrators should also be considered as victims.

For more information:

- Sexual Development in Children and Young People: developing a best practice approach DSCB/Babcock LDP (2015)
- <http://www.devonsafeguardingchildren.org/documents/2015/09/sexual-development-in-children-and-young-people-developing-a-best-practice-approach.pdf>

Devon Safeguarding Children Board – Recognising and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse



RECOGNISING and
RESPONDING TO SEX