

# Safeguarding 7-minute briefing: Sexual abuse

## Remember...

Most sexual abuse isn't reported, detected or prosecuted. Most children don't tell anyone that they're being sexually abused. It's a crime that is usually only witnessed by the abuser and the victim.

## Background

Sexual abuse is any sexual activity with a child.

- Children/young people do not always recognise themselves as victims.
- Children/young people may not understand what is happening and may not even understand that it is wrong.
- Sexual abuse can have a long-term impact on their mental health.
- Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

## Top Tips – see handout

- Tip 1 - Keep your support child-centred
- Tip 2 – The bond you form is key to recovery
- Tip 3 – Help carers feel supported and understood
- Tip 4 – Use the child's support network
- Tip 5 – Your own welfare is important.

## Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex. It can also occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children.



## Contact and Non-Contact Abuse

Contact abuse involves touching activities where an abuser makes physical contact with a child, including penetration.

Non-contact abuse involves non-touching activities, such as grooming, exploitation, persuading children to perform sexual acts over the internet and flashing.

## Indicators

Children may: avoid certain people, avoid being alone with people - family/friends, seem frightened of a person; reluctant to socialise with them. Show sexual behaviour that's inappropriate for their age. Have physical symptoms: anal or vaginal soreness; an unusual discharge; sexually transmitted infection (STI); pregnancy.

## Things you may notice:

Withdrawn; suddenly behaves differently; anxious; clingy; depressed; aggressive; problems sleeping; eating disorders; wets the bed; soils clothes; takes risks; misses school; changes in eating habits; obsessive behaviour; nightmares; drugs; alcohol; self-harm; thoughts about suicide

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[Click to complete the quiz](#)

# Top Tips Explained

## Tip 1 - Keep your support child-centred

- Be prepared to listen. Don't assume all experiences are the same. You haven't heard it all before.
- Include children in making the decisions that affect them and be open.
- Confidence and trust need to be built first. Don't expect children and young people to want to talk about their abuse.
- Children don't always respond to direct questions and may not have the words to describe what was done to them or the impact it had.

## Tip 2 - The bond you form with each child is key to their recovery

- Don't promise what you can't deliver. But, you can instil a sense of hope and optimism. You want them to feel she or he "can help me with this".
- Ensure the child knows they are believed and that you've followed up on what they've told you. They need assurance they will be protected.

## Tip 3 - Help carers feel supported and understood

- Parents react in different ways to the abuse of their child, be it denial, anger, guilt or depression. This can affect their ability to support those who need them most.
- Be positive about the potential for children to recover and their essential role now and in the future when therapy ends.

## Tip 4 - Understand and use the child's support network

- Identify roles and responsibilities of all professionals. Child protection concerns need to be shared and addressed in a timely manner.
- Quickly implement home safety plans and school safety plans – if you don't know how to do these, then ask for advice and support.

## Tip 5 - Your own welfare as a practitioner is important

- Professionals need to look after themselves when working with sexual abuse. Even if you're a qualified social worker, you'll come across things you haven't seen before. Good supervision and peer support is vital.
- Don't be afraid to say you feel stuck and to ask for advice from peers or others in a position to advise