

What we all need to know

Keeping children safe from sexual abuse



Easy read available

What we need to know to protect our children

This leaflet aims to offer the information we all need to prevent child sexual abuse, recognise the warning signs and build the confidence to do something about it.

It's always better to talk through a worry or gut feeling rather than ignore it and hope everything is ok.



What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse is a difficult subject to think and talk about.

People don't always realise that there are different forms of child sexual abuse.

But it is usually when an adult forces or persuades a child to take part in sexual activities. This can happen both online and offline.

Sometimes the child won't understand that what's happening to them is abuse. They may not even understand that it's wrong.

While most of this abuse is committed by adults, up to 1/3 is committed by people under 18.

If you'd like to talk through any concerns or get more information, you can call the confidential Stop It Now! helpline on 0808 1000 900 for anonymous support or visit stopitnow.org.uk/helpline to get in touch online.



What's the risk?

Child sexual abuse is a huge problem, but it is often hidden. It affects children from all backgrounds.

- **Around 1/6 children will be sexually abused. Many won't tell anyone.**
- **Most sexual abuse is carried out by someone the child knows. Around 1/3 of sexual abuse is carried out by other children and young people.**
- **Children with a disability are over three times more likely to be sexually abused than children who don't have a disability.**
- **Research shows that LGBTQ+ young people are more likely to be sexually abused than heterosexual young people.**

Shame can mean abuse isn't talked about or reported, especially in ethnic minority communities.

Who sexually abuses children?

People who sexually abuse children come from all backgrounds, ethnicities, communities and walks of life.

They can be anyone – men, women, married, single, young people, children, family members, friends or professionals.

Most children who are sexually abused are abused by someone they know and trust.

They are:

- **people we know**
- **people we care about**
- **people from all classes, cultures and backgrounds.**



"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

How abuse happens

It is not easy to understand how ordinary people can harm children.

Getting close to children and adults – grooming

Many are good at making 'friends' with children and the adults close to them. Some make friends with parents who are having difficulties, sometimes on their own. Others seem trustworthy and offer to babysit or other support with childcare.

Secrets

People who sexually abuse children may tempt them buy gifts or treats. They may also threaten the child if they say 'no' or tell someone. To keep the abuse secret the abuser will often play on the child's fear, embarrassment or guilt about the situation and that no one will believe them if they told.



Why don't children tell?

Many children who have been sexually abused don't tell anyone about it because they are embarrassed, or that no one will believe them.

Sometimes a child is so young or afraid that they don't know or can't find the words to explain what happened. And sometimes they are so confused that they don't realise it is wrong.

It is important for children to have trusted adults in their lives who they can talk to about any concerns, to take all concerns seriously and report it no matter who it involves.

What increases the risk to a child or family?

Any child can be sexually abused. People who abuse children come from all backgrounds and all walks of life.

Some factors that can make a child more vulnerable:

- Lack of parental supervision, heavy dependence on babysitters
- Poor or negative communication
- Lack of accurate sexual education
- Poor understanding of relationships between adults and children
- Isolated, lonely, emotionally deprived children
- Substance or alcohol misuse in the home

Here are other things that might increase the risk to children with a disability:

- A physical disability might mean they are less able to resist or avoid abuse
- Communication or learning difficulties can make it more difficult to prevent abuse or tell someone about it
- Having different carers might mean changes in behaviour go unnoticed or the child is not able to communicate it
- The needs of parents and carers might be different from the needs of the child
- The child or carer might worry that complaints will lead to losing services.





Signs to watch out for in children and young people

Children often show us, rather than tell us, that something is upsetting them. If we notice any of these worrying signs, it may be time to seek help or advice.

What to watch out for in children

- **Unexpected change in behaviour or personality**
- **Acting out in sexual ways with toys or objects**
- **Showing a sexual awareness beyond their age (for example, using rude words)**

There might be other signs in children with learning difficulties or disabilities:

- **Changes in personal care frequency such as toileting, changing pads, nappies, or soiling themselves**
- **Flinching away from carer or suddenly disliking support staff**
- **Refusing food**

You can find out more about the signs of child sexual abuse on our Parents Protect website: parentsprotect.co.uk





Signs in adults that they might be a risk

Most children who are sexually abused are abused by someone they know and trust.

There might be cause for concern about the behaviour of an adult or young person if they:



- **Insist on kissing, hugging, wrestling or tickling even when the child does not want it**
- **Discuss or share sexual jokes or material with a child or young person, online or offline**
- **Insist on time alone with a child**
- **Regularly offer to babysit children for free or take children on overnight outings alone**

- **Buy children expensive gifts or give them money for no reason**
- **Treat one child as a favourite, making them feel 'special' compared with others in the family or pick on one child**

It's always better to talk through a worry or gut feeling rather than ignore it and hope everything is ok.

Online safety

Children often use different websites and apps from their parents, and it can be hard to keep up.

But the things that help keep children safe online are often similar to the things that keep them safe offline.

Here are some tips to help you keep young people safe online:

- **Discuss boundaries before joining a social networking site**
- **Agree that a safe adult is added as a 'friend' and ensure they have a private profile**
- **Talk to them about the dangers of sharing personal information**
- **Ensure they understand not everybody is who they say they are online**

- **Remind them that the same rules apply online at home and at school**
- **Check your child knows how to report abuse or worrying behaviour and block contacts**
- **Start a conversation about the dangers of online pornography**
- **Remind them that they can talk to you if anything happens that upsets or worries them.**

You can choose some age-appropriate questions to start a conversation:

- Which apps and games are you using?
- What websites do you enjoy using and why?
- Do you have any online friends?
Who are they?

What to do if a child tells you about abuse

1 Respond with care and urgency

2 Believe the child

3 Be supportive

4 Stay calm

5 Be caring

6 Face the problem

7 Re-establish safety

8 Get help

9 Do not despair

What can I do if I have concerns or worries?

If you see warning signs and don't know what to do, get advice and help.

- **If your child is in immediate danger call the police on 999.**
- **You can speak people who will help you at Stop It Now! on 0808 1000 900.**
- **You can find out what happens after you tell someone about the abuse on the Stop It Now! Wales website.**
- **You can also find contact details for your local Children's Services by searching online.**
- **You can speak to the Mencap helpline by calling 0808 8000 300 or searching online.**

These organisations speak English and Welsh. All of them can help you if you or your child have additional support needs.

How you can keep your children safe

Using some of these tips can help develop a protective family environment that can prevent and respond to concerns about child sexual abuse.

1 Know the signs of child sexual abuse

2 Open communication

3 Ask questions

4 Set boundaries

5 Educate everyone in the family

6 Get help and advice



Ideas to start a conversation with your child

Talking to your child about safety can feel scary. Start with simple, age-appropriate conversations.

Using some of these tips you can help keep your children safe:

- Talk to them about how their body belongs to them and they can say no if someone tries to touch them
- Chose the right time to talk: bath-time, walking home from school or in the car are all good times
- Avoid using scary words: start by saying "can I talk to you about this - because it's important to me"
- Explain to them the difference between a "good secret" – like a surprise party, and a "bad secret" – one that you can never tell anyone.



Don't be afraid to ask questions – follow your gut instinct

- Who else cares for your child? Sleepovers, family members, paid carers?
- Find out what your child learns at school such as healthy relationships and sex education
- Have you discussed family boundaries? Privacy, supervision, family visitors, children's friends?

Where to get help and advice

All of these organisations can help you if you or your child have additional support needs.

The confidential Stop It Now! helpline

It's always better to talk through a worry or gut feeling rather than ignore it and hope everything is ok. Call 0808 1000 900 for support or visit stopitnow.org.uk/helpline to talk online.

Parents Protect

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

It has more on the information included in this leaflet and short films to help you understand the risks and how to protect children.

parentsprotect.co.uk

Mencap

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

NSPCC Underwear Rule for children with disabilities and 'Pantosaurus'

With the help of a friendly dinosaur, these resources help parents talk to their children about body safety – search online for 'Pantosaurus'.

Stop It Now! Wales is working with Learning Disability Wales (LDW) to help prevent child sexual abuse in families where there is a disability

Stop It Now! Wales is part of The Lucy Faithfull Foundation - a child protection charity dedicated to preventing child sexual abuse.

We work with families and professionals 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.

Find out more at: ldw.org.uk

This project is funded by the Welsh Government.

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You can also find general advice and information in English and Welsh on our websites:

stopitnow.org.uk/wales
parentsprotect.co.uk

All children and young people have the right to live their life safe and free from harm. Find out more about children's rights in Wales:
gov.wales/childrens-rights-in-wales



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

Stop It Now!

WALES | CYMRU

Helping prevent
child sexual abuse



Learning Disability Wales
Anabledd Dysgu Cymru

**THE
LUCY FAITHFULL
FOUNDATION**

Working to protect children