

What we all need to know

Keeping LGBTQ+
children and
young people
safe from sexual
abuse



What we need to know to protect our children

Most victims of child sexual abuse do not talk about it and can't ask for help. So adults have to. We can prevent child sexual abuse from happening in the first place by understanding the risks, putting in place family safety plans, and knowing what to do if we have a concern.

This guide is a part of a series of leaflets produced with the aim of providing how child sexual abuse might affect different identities and communities. Evidence shows that different identities and communities' experiences of child sexual abuse is different, and that might be because of stigma, inequalities, barriers or discrimination.

This leaflet aims to provide the information we all need to prevent child sexual abuse, to recognise the warning signs and to 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. If you'd like to talk through any concerns or get more information, you can speak to the experienced advisors on our confidential Stop It Now! helpline.

Callers do not need to give identifying information, so can remain anonymous. We speak to thousands of people every year, and help them take action to protect children and young people from sexual abuse and exploitation.



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

What is child sexual abuse?

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

It isn't just about an adult having sex with a child or touching a child in a sexual way, although it often does involve touching a child's private parts or making them touch someone else's.

It can also include other activities, such as showing a child pornography or forcing a child to watch a sexual act.

Child sexual abuse also happens online, for example making and sharing sexual images of under 18s (sometimes called child pornography), and having sexual conversations with under 16s, commonly called grooming.

While most of this abuse is committed by adults, as much as one third is committed by people under 18.

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

What does LGBTQ+ mean?

LGBTQ+ relates to sexuality and gender identity.

- **Sexuality** means who you are sexually or romantically attracted to.
- **Gender identity** means whether you see yourself as male, female, both or neither.

LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer or questioning, and the '+' represents a range of identities that are included under the LGBT umbrella.

LGBTQ+ people can face prejudice and negative attitudes, including biphobia, homophobia and/or transphobia.

What's the risk?

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

- Around one in six children will be sexually abused. Many won't tell anyone, and most won't be known to police, social services or health workers.
- Most sexual abuse is carried out by someone the child knows. Around one third of sexual abuse is carried out by other children and young people.
- Children with a disability are more likely to be sexually abused than children who don't have a disability.
- Some research has showed that LGBTQ+ young people are more likely to be sexually abused than non-LGBTQ+ young people.
- Research has also shown that LGBTQ+ young people are less likely to receive any help or support.

Feelings of shame can mean abuse isn't talked about or reported.

Who sexually abuses children?

People who sexually abuse children come from all backgrounds, ethnicities, communities, genders, sexual orientations, relationship statuses and areas of work.

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 a boy abused by a neighbour

How abuse happens

It is not easy to understand how ordinary people can harm children. Some people who sexually abuse children know that it is wrong and are unhappy about what they are doing. Others think their behaviour is OK and that what they do shows their love for 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 will present themselves as trustworthy and offer to babysit or other support with childcare. Some find trusted positions in the community which put them in contact with children.

Secrets

People who sexually abuse children might offer a combination of gifts or treats and threats about what will happen if the child says 'no' or tells someone. To keep the abuse secret the abuser will often play on the child's fear, embarrassment or guilt about what is happening. They might convince the child that no one will believe them if they told.





What increases the risk to a child or family?

Any child can be sexually abused. People who abuse children come from all backgrounds and walks of life. The stereotypes don't match reality.

But children and young people can be especially vulnerable if they are lonely, or feel isolated. They might have fallen out with their friends, or not like the way they look. Their behaviour could become challenging or they might seek extra attention. They might start taking greater risks than they normally would. When they are like this, they might be more challenging for us as parents, and it can be quite easy to switch off as they are hard work. But in fact, this is when they need us most as parents.

Some factors that can make a child more vulnerable:

- Lack of parental supervision, heavy reliance on babysitters
- Poor or negative communication
- Lack of accurate sexual education
- Lots of visitors to the home
- Lack of understanding of appropriate relationships between adults and children
- Experiences of witnessing violent, aggressive relationships
- Isolated, lonely, emotionally deprived children
- Substance or alcohol misuse in the home.

Why don't children tell?

Many children who have been sexually abused don't tell anyone about the abuse at the time it happens because of embarrassment or humiliation, or thinking that they wouldn't be believed.

Sometimes a child is so young or afraid that they don't know or can't find the words to explain what is happening to them. And sometimes they are so confused by the person that has abused them, that they might not know that what is happening is wrong.

It is important for children to have trusted adults in their lives who they can talk to about any concerns. Children may feel like they will not be believed if the perpetrator is someone very respected or highly regarded in the community. But it is important to take all concerns seriously and report them no matter who it involves.



What about LGBTQ+ young people?

LGBTQ+ children and young people can be vulnerable to sexual abuse in the ways that affect all children but also for some specific reasons.

- If the young person isn't 'out' as LGBTQ+, someone who is abusive can exploit this by threatening to 'out' them or by befriending them.
- LGBTQ+ teenagers might not have many positive role models of LGBTQ+ adults or relationships, or have received effective relationships and sexuality education (RSE), and so may be pressured into behaviour that they are told is 'what LGBTQ+ people do'.
- LGBTQ+ young people who don't have any role models might search online for information and this may take them into highly sexualised adult online dating contexts.
- LGBTQ+ young people's communities can be quite small and young people can fear losing their friends if they disclose abuse happening within peer relationships and networks.
- Some adults abuse LGBTQ+ young people as a form of hate crime or to punish or 'cure' them.

LGBTQ+ Identities

Knowing who you are and understanding your own sexual and/or gender identity is a process that takes time. Deciding whether to tell anyone else and who to tell is a lifelong process. For LGBTQ+ people, this is called 'coming out'. Anybody who is 'coming out' should be able to do so on their own terms, and in their own time. Nobody should ever be 'outed' without their consent.

When some LGBTQ+ children and young people disclose abuse, they may have to come out or face being outed by others.

Speaking up about sexual violence can already be daunting for children and young people, however, for LGBTQ+ children and young people it can become particularly daunting when they might also have to reveal who they are and share sensitive information about their identity.

If and whenever your child comes out to you, there is hope, and it's a positive thing, this is because they are telling you who they are and inviting you to share in this part of their life.

When children and young people come out as LGBTQ+, if that's during disclosing abuse or not, they will need to be supported by a positive environment that recognises and respects their identity. This is especially true for those having to share their LGBTQ+ identity when disclosing abuse.

People come out in a variety of different ways, and it can take time for both the young person and you to get used to their identity. There are organisations that offer support to young people and parents during this process – we've included some at the end of this leaflet.

OVER HALF OF LGBTQ RESPONDENTS (53%) KNEW THEY WERE LGBTQ+ BY THE AGE OF 13. OVER HALF OF TRANS RESPONDENTS (58%) KNEW THEY WERE TRANS BY THE SAME AGE.

METRO CHARITY, 2016

LGBTQ+ children and young people might not tell about abuse for the reasons that affect all children, but there are also some specific barriers for LGBTQ+ children.

- Some LGBTQ+ young people will find it harder to speak up because it requires the young person to disclose the abuse and also possibly to disclose their identity.
- Children may be exploring their sexuality and/or gender identity and not know for sure how to define themselves. Sexual abuse can make them question themselves or deny who they are.
- LGBTQ+ young people might worry that when they say what happened, the response they get to being LGBTQ+ will be worse than the abuse that they are already experiencing. They might fear being outed and fear having no control over know knows.
- Children might fear that people will think that the abuse is the reason that they are LGBTQ+. It is very important not to say this to LGBTQ+ young people.

ALMOST ONE IN FIVE (18%) LGBTQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE EXPERIENCED SOME FORM OF SEXUAL ABUSE, COMPARED WITH ONE IN TEN (11%) OF NON-TRANS HETEROSEXUALS. MOST LGBTQ+ RESPONDENTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL ABUSE (79%) HAVE NOT RECEIVED ANY HELP OR SUPPORT.

METRO CHARITY, 2016



Signs to watch out for in children and young people

Children often show us, rather than tell us, that something is upsetting them. There might be many reasons for changes in their behaviour, but if we notice a combination of worrying signs, it is time to seek help or advice.

What to watch out for in children

- Unexpected change in behaviour or personality
- Regressing to younger behaviours
- Acting out in sexual ways with toys or objects
- Unaccountable fears of people or places
- Showing a sexual awareness beyond their age
- Unexplained money or gifts
- Being anxious or depressed
- Self-harm
- Using drugs or alcohol

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

If you'd like to talk through any concerns or get more information, 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.

You can find out more about the signs of child sexual abuse by searching online for 'Parents Protect'.



Signs in adults that they might be a risk

Most children who are sexually abused are abused by someone they know and trust. As hard as it is to think about, that means that sometimes family and friends might be a risk to children. So we still need to think about safety when children are with people they should be able to trust, such as at family gatherings or parties.

The signs that an adult might be using their relationship with a child for sexual reasons might not be obvious. We might feel uncomfortable about the way they play with the child, or seem always to be favouring them and creating reasons for them to be alone.

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

- Don't allow a child enough privacy
- Insist on kissing, hugging, wrestling or tickling even when the child does not want it
- Are interested in the sexual development of a child or teenager
- Discuss or share sexual jokes or sexual material with a child or young person, online or offline
- Insist on time alone with a child, with no interruptions
- Spend most of their spare time with children and have little interest in spending time with people their own age
- 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 a particular child as a favourite, making them feel 'special' compared with others in the family
- Pick on a particular child.

What can parents and carers do?

Be positive about your child being LGBTQ+ (or LGBTQ+ people in general, if your child isn't out to you).

- **Try to create a safe, positive home environment for the young person to be able to talk about what's on their mind.** If you aren't LGBTQ+, you can teach yourself about LGBTQ+ issues from online resources (see list below). You can celebrate LGBTQ+ role models in the home.
- **Make it clear to your child that you will be there for them regardless of their sexuality or gender identity.** People who abuse children and young people can use shame and fear of rejection to silence them, so not shaming or rejecting your LGBTQ+ child is important in countering these messages.
- **Believe that a young person is who they say they are, and be open to the fact that this may change over time as they explore the spectrum of sexuality and gender identity.**
- **You can check what your child's school is doing about inclusive education** (without outing your child as this could make life more difficult for them at school).
- **Talk positively with your child about the LGBTQ+ friendships that enable them to flourish.** But if you feel that your child is being pressured to do things they are not comfortable with, or are out of character for them, trust your gut instinct and try to explore this in a supportive manner with your child and get advice.

If your child has been abused, be clear with them that their sexuality or gender identity is not to blame and you support them to be who they are.

- **Place the responsibility for the abuse with the abuser.** Do not judge the entire LGBTQ+ community because of this abuse; it is important to place the negative feelings associated with the abuse with the perpetrator of that abuse. Predatory people who abuse unfortunately exist in all communities.
- **Continue to be positive about LGBTQ+ people and communities in general.**
- **See if you can find LGBTQ+ specific support for your child, if they want it.** A good LGBTQ+ organisation will always give LGBTQ+ teenagers a positive sense of who they are and their right not to experience abuse.

What to do if a child tells you about abuse

- 1 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.
- 2 Believe the child**
If a child trusts you enough to tell you about abuse, you must remember that they rarely lie about such things.
- 3 Be supportive**
It is important that they feel supported - don't dismiss their claims or put them off talking about it.
- 4 Stay calm**
If they are talking to you about it, don't get angry or upset. Stay calm. 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.
- 5 Be caring**
Make sure the child knows you love them and that they haven't done anything wrong and keep reassuring them of this.
- 6 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.
- 7 Re-establish safety**
To keep your child safe you can put into place a family safety plan.
- 8 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.
- 9 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.
- 10 Call 0808 1000 900 for anonymous support**
Or visit stopitnow.org.uk/helpline to get in touch online.

Online safety

Children regularly use different websites and apps from their parents, and it can be hard to keep up in this ever-changing digital world.

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

Show them how to report any worrying behaviour they see online – for example through Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command or the Internet Watch Foundation. [Visit **ceop.police.uk/ceop-reporting**](https://www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-reporting)

We are helping prepare our children for their futures if we help them go online safely and responsibly. Many people worry about amounts of screen time, but there can be lots of positives about what your child is doing online – entertainment, keeping in touch with friends and researching homework – so quality screen time is what's important.

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

- Discuss expectations before joining a social networking site
- Agree that a trusted and supportive adult is added as a 'friend' and ensure they have a private profile
- Talk to them about the dangers of sharing personal data
- Talk about what they think is normal online and what behaviour to expect from other and themselves
- Encourage them to think critically and question what they see online
- Ensure they understand not everybody is who they say they are when they only meet online
- Show them how to report any worrying behaviour they see or experience online
- Remind them that the same rules apply online at home and at school
- Check your child knows how to report abuse or block contacts
- Start a conversation about online pornography and the dangers of it
- Check the age ratings of games, online films and programmes
- Remind them that they can talk to you if they see or anything happens that upsets or worries them.

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

- Which apps/games are you using?
- What websites do you enjoy using and why?
- How does this game/app work? Can I play?
- Do you have any online friends? Who are they?
- Where would you go for help?
- Do you know how to block and report?
- Do you know what your personal information is?
- Do you know your limits?
- Have you heard about 'nudes' being sent around?
- What would you do if someone asked you?
- Have you ever spoken to strangers online?
- What kind of things would make you feel uncomfortable online – strangers, picture requests, contacts from family members, being tagged in pictures, friend/follow requests?
- Do you know what your rights and responsibilities online are?

What can I do if I have concerns or worries?

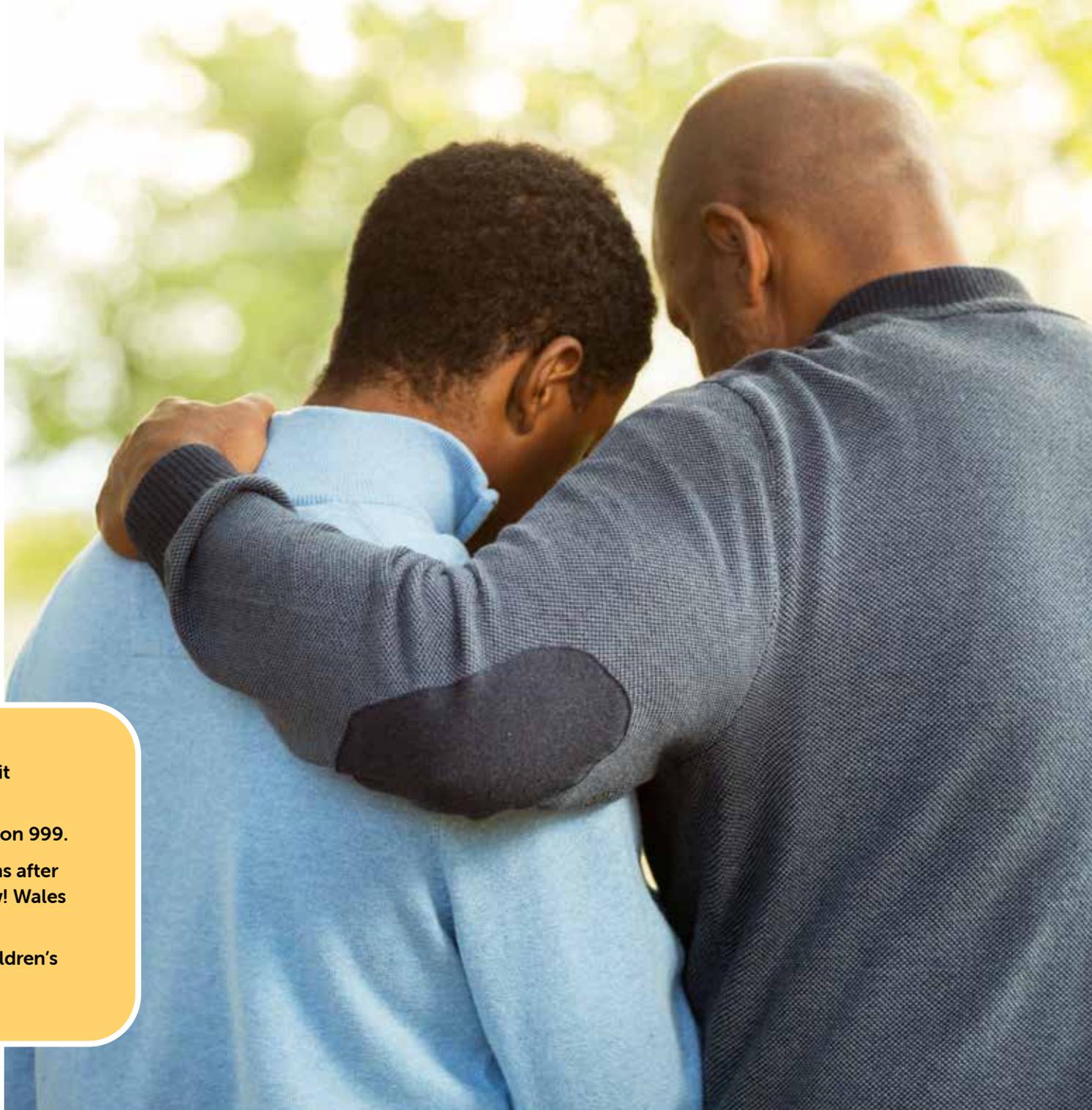
If you know about abuse and don't tell anyone, the person who offended might well continue to abuse, the child will continue to suffer, and more children might become victims. But you can change that.

If you see warning signs and don't know what to do, get advice and help. It's always better to talk through a worry or gut feeling rather than ignore it and hope everything is ok.

You can speak to the experienced advisors on our confidential Stop It Now! helpline.

Callers do not need to give identifying information, so can remain anonymous. We speak to thousands of people every year, and help them take action to protect children and young people from sexual abuse and exploitation.

- **Call 0808 1000 900 for anonymous support or visit stopitnow.org.uk/helpline to get in touch online.**
- **If your child is in immediate danger call the police on 999.**
- **You can find more information about what happens after you make a disclosure of abuse on the Stop It Now! Wales website.**
- **You can also find contact details for your local Children's Services by searching online.**





How you can keep your children safe

Using some of these ideas to keep your child safe can help develop a protective family environment that can prevent and respond to concerns about child sexual abuse. This can help develop skills in children to become resilient and to bounce back from difficult things in their lives.

1

Know the signs of child sexual abuse

Warning signs is just another way of saying 'opportunity to protect'. Doing something when you spot the signs can prevent harm happening in the first place.

2

Open communication

Let your child know that they can come to you if they're worried about anything and that you'll listen, believe and help them. But it is not a one-time only event – let everyone know it is ok to ask questions.

3

Ask questions

Take an interest in what your children are doing, where they're going and who they're with. This is as important online as it is in the real world.

4

Set boundaries

If your child doesn't want to hug or kiss someone, then this should be respected. Let children set their own boundaries and only consent to what they feel comfortable to do. They have the right to say no.

5

Educate everyone in the family

Understanding the issues and passing information on will help protect children from harm.

6

Get help and advice

You can speak confidentially to the Stop It Now! Helpline. 0808 1000 900. You can remain anonymous when you call. You will receive help, support and advice from the experienced advisors.

Ideas to start a conversation with your child

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. But it is important to keep the lines of communication open. Talking with teenagers will require a different approach than talking with younger children. We suggest choosing your time carefully.

It's important that your children know that they can go to you about any topic. Children need to know that they are going to be listened to without judgement. Listening is just as important as talking with young people. Sometimes sitting quietly while a young person offloads is just as effective as giving advice.

Often teenagers will use the internet, their friends or even pornography to answer their questions about sex and sexuality. It is important to help young people be confident and to talk about issues in a safe way. Seek advice from trusted people or places like the NSPCC, Childline or Stonewall Cymru's website.

Let your young person know that it is ok to say no and that they do not need to do anything they don't want to.

Talk about peer pressure and their rights to be in charge of their own bodies.

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

- Who else has responsibility for your child?
Sleepovers, family members, paid carers?
- Are you aware of what your child learns in education?
Personal safety, healthy relationships, self-protection, sex education?
- Have you discussed family boundaries?
Privacy, supervision, family visitors, children's friends?



Where to get help and advice

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

Callers do not need to give identifying information, so can remain anonymous. We speak to thousands of people every year, and help them take action to protect children and young people from sexual abuse and exploitation.

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

You can find more information about what happens after you report abuse on the [Stop It Now! Wales website](https://stopitnow.org.uk).

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 in English and Welsh. It also has a guide to help you

make a family safety plan and SMART rules that you can pass on to your children to help them keep safe. And there are books that can help you start really important conversations with your children.

parentsprotect.co.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'.

Thinkuknow

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

thinkuknow.co.uk

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

There are many organisations in Wales that can help with LGBTQ+ issues

Galop

Advice and support for LGBTQ+ people who have experienced sexual assault, abuse or violence.
galop.org.uk

Stonewall Cymru

Advice, support and information, including on coming out.
stonewall.cymru

Umbrella Cymru

umbrellacymru.co.uk

LGBT Cymru Helpline

lgbtcymru.org.uk

Mermaids UK

mermaidsuk.org.uk

Strong Family Alliance

strongfamilyalliance.org

The Proud Trust

theproudtrust.org

Gendered Intelligence

genderedintelligence.co.uk

Mosac

Support for non-abusive parents.
mosac.org.uk

Live Fear Free

gov.wales/live-fear-free

FFLAG

Supporting parents and families and their LGBTQ+ members.

fflag.org.uk

LGBTQ+ Youth Groups in Wales

GISDA's LGBTQ+ youth group – North Wales

gisda.org

Viva LGBT – North Wales

vivalgbt.co.uk

Impact – Cardiff

cathays.org.uk/youth/impact

Newport LGBTQ+ youth group

[facebook.com/
NewportLGBTQYouth](https://facebook.com/NewportLGBTQYouth)

GoodVibes – Swansea

Search for GoodVibes at:
swansea.gov.uk

You can also ask your local authority's youth service about what groups they have in your area.

Stop It Now! Wales is working with Stonewall Cymru to keep LGBTQ+ children and young people safe from child sexual abuse

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 anonymous advice to anyone with worries about child sexual abuse and how to prevent it.

Stonewall Cymru stands for all lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning, and ace (LGBTQ+) people. Stonewall Cymru imagines a world where LGBTQ+ people everywhere are free to be themselves and can live their lives to the full.

This booklet was created in collaboration with LGBTQ+ youth group leaders and Galop, the leading charity for LGBTQ+ people who have experienced sexual assault, abuse or violence.

This partnership is funded by the Welsh Government.

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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

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

stopitnow.org.uk/wales

parentsprotect.co.uk



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
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Stop It Now!

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Helping prevent
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**THE
LUCY FAITHFULL
FOUNDATION**

Working to protect children