

Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership



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Pan Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership (PDSCP)

Joint Protocol for cases involving Intra-familial Child Sexual Abuse

1. Purpose

This multi-agency safeguarding protocol has been developed to ensure that effective measures are taken to safeguard children who are or may be at risk of intra-familial child sexual abuse (IFCSA), whether or not a criminal investigation is in progress.

2. Scope

The protocol governs the work of police and practitioners in Dorset Council Children's Services. As this is a place-based Dorset protocol, produced in collaboration with Dorset Council Children's Services and the Police, this does not apply to practitioners working in BCP Council.

3. Context

- 3.1 This protocol has been drafted in response to multi-agency learning from the Thematic Review of Intra-Familial Child Sexual Abuse (PDSCP, March 2022)¹. It also incorporates learning from The Siblings Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (September 2022)².
- 3.2 The protocol has been written in the recognition that children and young people cannot, and should not be expected to, keep themselves safe from child sexual abuse; this is the responsibility of adults.
- 3.3 This protocol is additional to and does not replace the core guidance on identifying, reporting and responding to suspected CSA set out in the PDSCP procedure [Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment](#).
- 3.4 Practitioners using this protocol should also be familiar with:

'Guidance for Sharing Expert Reports in Child Protection Conferences' in the Children's Services Procedures Library/Local Resources

¹ [Final-Dorset-CSPR-Report-Thematic-summary-intra-familial-sexual-abuse-31.03.2022-1.pdf \(pdscp.co.uk\)](#)

² [FINAL-LCSPR-Report-The-Siblings-05.08.2022-1.pdf \(pdscp.co.uk\)](#)

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Dorset Council ChAD Service Manager, and Dorset Police are currently drafting guidance on ensuring that police investigations are not compromised and the link to this guidance will be included in this protocol once available.

4. Effective Safeguarding Practices

- 4.1 Investigations of intra-familial CSA are likely to be complex. Those suspected to be responsible for causing harm may seek to deter, deflect or disrupt the investigation. In cases where intra-familial CSA is suspected joint working by two Social Workers should always be considered, including for any visits to a child and/or their family, to offer reflection and challenge to the assessment.
- 4.2 Where the Police decide not to investigate (or to cease an existing criminal investigation into) suspected intra-familial CSA, the police officer responsible for this decision will send a written opinion confirming their decision, and brief reasons for it, to Dorset Children's Service, education and health practitioners involved.
- 4.3 This can be recorded by Children's Services on Mosaic, but this will need to follow the guidance that relates to sensitive information that has been agreed with the police and which can be found at the beginning of the Mosaic guidance:

'When we have been given this sensitive information, it will need to be recorded on Mosaic and there is a specific case note identified for this purpose. The correct case note type to choose is 'Official Sensitive'. The Subject field for the case note should say '*Sensitive information received from*'
- 4.4 On receipt of written confirmation of the decision not to investigate from the police, the allocated Social Worker and their Team Manager will convene a Strategy Meeting to determine next steps.
- 4.5 A Strategy Meeting should also be convened where intra-familial CSA that does not involve physical contact is suspected, and where police are awaiting the results of forensic examination of computers or other digital devices, to ensure that this wait does not delay any necessary safeguarding measures.
- 4.6 The Strategy Meeting will receive and review a multi-agency chronology for all children in the household (including those that have left home). This should include all events that may pertain to intra-familial CSA. Information to be

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- included in the chronology should be notified to the allocated social workers at least three working days before the Strategy Meeting.
- 4.7 The Strategy Meeting will consider which, if any, legal orders might be pursued to protect the child(ren). The Strategy Meeting will be attended by a lawyer from Dorset Council's Child Care Legal Team in the capacity of an observer. The lawyer will meet separately with the social work team following the Strategy Meeting to give legal advice as to the threshold for issuing proceedings. It is the expectation that the lawyer will have been provided with all relevant paperwork prior to the Strategy Meeting.
 - 4.8 The Strategy Meeting will assess the risk of potential harm to the child(ren) concerned and determine the means by which further relevant evidence may be sought. The age of the child(ren) will be considered in the assessment of risks; it should not be assumed that older children are 'safer' or more readily able to keep themselves safe. It will also plan its response to any disclosures that may be made.
 - 4.9 In the meeting's assessment of risk, those attending will be encouraged to voice intuitive as well as analytical judgments. Intuitive judgments are those based on 'gut feeling' and practice wisdom; analytical ones are based on rules, evidence and formal reasoning. Neither form of judgment should be relied on to the exclusion of the other; rather, there should be a balance of the two in the assessment of risk and the subsequent decision-making.
 - 4.10 Where a child has already made a disclosure, the Strategy Meeting will plan the steps to be taken if the child subsequently states that the abuse did not happen.
 - 4.11 The Strategy Meeting will consider whether a Child Sexual Exploitation risk assessment should be carried out with the child(ren) and record its decision.
 - 4.12 The meeting will also check that referrals to a child sexual health clinic and other forms of help and support have been made as required, and record these.
 - 4.13 The meeting will consider whether an application should be made to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) and, if so, who should make this application.
 - 4.14 The decisions of the Strategy Meeting will be recorded, together with any actions to be taken and those responsible and circulated to all those invited in accordance with our procedures.

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5. Oversight and escalation

Dorset Council, Dorset Police and NHS Dorset are jointly responsible for the operation of this protocol. Its effectiveness will be reviewed by the Multi-Agency Quality of Practice and Action Group six months after implementation, and annually thereafter.

Should any partner agency believe that the protocol has not been effectively implemented, they will discuss the action to be taken with their line manager and agree the next action. This could include a formal escalation.

Scrutiny of the implementation of this guidance will come from internal audit processes and multi-agency audits.

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