

CHILD AND FAMILY ASSESSMENT AND SAFETY PLANNING PRACTICE GUIDANCE – SEXUAL HARM

The purpose of this guidance is to assist you when undertaking assessment and intervention with children and their family when there are adult* intrafamilial sexual abuse risks. During your assessment and intervention, you will be formulating risk management plans alongside and informed by your evolving risk assessment in order to safeguard children and as such you do not always need a specialist risk assessment to guide you in this. You can consider the following aspects.

*Note, where the harmful sexual behaviours are displayed by children, CATS should be contacted for specialist consultation around risk, intervention and planning.

Understanding the risk of sexual harm to children includes 3 inter-related aspects to the risk analysis and safety planning.

1. Understanding the risk and how this relates to the specific child
2. Understanding the vulnerability of the child and what can increase their resilience
3. Increasing the protective capacity of the non-offending parent.

1. Risk Factors

Determining what type of risk assessment is required under specific circumstances is dependent on the stage of investigation.

Allegation – If an allegation is currently under investigation by police then *no* specific sexual risk assessment can be undertaken due to the potential to jeopardise the police investigation. However, within the Child and Family Assessment process further information can be gathered around the

contributing factors that may potentially be increasing the conditions for offending (see below contributing factors).

No conviction/No further action - If an allegation has resulted in police investigation concluding with No Further Action, the information on possible contributing factors can be gathered.

In some of these circumstances, for example where there are contributing psychological/mental health factors then it may be appropriate to seek a specialist risk assessment and request should be made through Next Steps Panel.

Discussions with the family can be completed on the basis of the fact that an allegation was made even if not proven and what safety measures can be in place to prevent future allegations.

Conviction - If the perpetrator has a conviction for sexual offences against a child, it is unlikely that a specialist risk assessment needs to be commissioned by Children's Social Care. Probation/ VISOR will have a risk assessment and have recommended what needs to happen to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. That risk assessment needs to be shared so that we can relate those risk and protective factors to the child we are working with. We need to know whether the offender is meeting the requirements of the order and engaging in the protective interventions recommended within their assessment. This can then inform our safety planning and work to increase the protective capacity of the non-offending parent.

Contributing factors

To understand the risk of further offending it can be helpful to gather the following information. This can be achieved through discussions with the family and through reading history on the case file.

- Circumstances around the offence (can be obtained through the police /case files- *not* through discussion with the alleged offender if the investigation is ongoing), age of the child, nature of the offence, relationship to the victim, age of the alleged offender at the time of the offence.
- Any other offending history, violent or non-violent, as this can suggest an inability/unwillingness to conform to societal expectations
- Any experiences of previous trauma

- What strategies does the offender / alleged offender have to cope with stress / emotional regulation strategies.
- Mental health history
- Any drug/alcohol misuse history
- Relationship history, we need to understand their ability /difficulty forming healthy adult sexual relationships.
- Any factors that suggest an emotional congruence to children (eg difficulty relating to adults, childlike interests)
- Sexual history, how do they get their sexual needs met, interests, any issues with coercion or abuse within adult sexual relationships, any use of adult porn and how the type of porn may have escalated over time.
- Employment and housing stability
- Any history of domestic abuse.

2. The vulnerability/resilience of the child.

To reduce the risk of sexual abuse to the child we need to consider their resilience and vulnerabilities.

Factors to consider (but not limited to)

- Relationship with offender. Do they have loyalty / attachment to the offender
- Relationship with the non-offending parent, how able in that relationship are they to disclose
- Disability
- Other adverse childhood experiences or previous experiences of trauma.
- What other protective adults are there around them, eg extended family

Increasing the resilience of the child may include improving vulnerabilities such as the child's relationship with the non-offending parent.

3. Protective Capacity of the Non-Offending Parent

Children being believed by their safe attachment figure is a key factor in protecting children from harm and improved recovery from sexual trauma.

However, it is not unusual for a non-offending parent to go through a process of denial in discovering a sexual risk in their network. Denial is a natural

response to information that can be severely disrupting their hopes and dreams for their family life and discrediting what they thought they knew about their family.

We need to support the parent to work through this denial so that they can reach the stage of considering 'could my child be a risk' / 'what if it is true' with the ultimate aim of them and extended family becoming a protective network around the child. This work may take time and we need to enable the parent to work through this process alongside implementing and adjusting safety plans as the work progresses.

Working with the protective parent to increase their protective capacity and knowledge of sexual abuse can include:

- Recognising sexually abusive behaviours
- The impact of sexual abuse on children and recognising signs
- What is age appropriate sexual behaviours in children and young people
- The ripple effect of the risk upon the child and family network.
- Understanding the offending and grooming process
- Working with Denial
- Internet offending processes and motivation
- Exploring their understanding and acceptance of their role in creating safety for the children and what help they need to achieve this.

Resources to support with this work can be provided by CFIS.

Safety planning

An effective safety plan will include:

1. Reducing the likelihood of offending:

Preventing the potential abuser's access to the child. For example, this may include contact to be supervised, living separately.

Actions required to reduce the risk and likelihood of re-offending and this should include information from probation/VISOR as appropriate around any conditions imposed / services to address factors that increase the risk.

If there is no conviction, work with the alleged abuser can include how they prevent themselves being in a position with a child that enables a further allegation to be made. How do they understand their own behaviours and what increases the likelihood of a repeat allegation. Direct intervention with an abuser can be provided through the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (although there is a cost involved).

2. Increase the resilience of the child

Keep safe work so the child understands what the risk is. They should know who poses the risk and what this means to them. Transparency is key and an understanding of how secrecy increases risk is important to address with both adults and children.

Address issues that increase vulnerability such as health needs, communication needs.

Enhance relationships with safe attachment figures and protective wider family network and professionals. We need to maximise the possibility that the child has the ability and opportunity to share worries and experiences as this reduces the opportunity for any offender.

3. Increase the protective capacity of the non-offending parent

Protective parenting work to increase the non-offending parent's understanding of sexual abuse and how to notice risks for their own child.

Support the parent to move through denial without shame and be able to consider abuse as a possibility.

They need to learn to recognise behaviours in the risk posing adult's behaviours that suggests the conditions/motivation for offending are increasing.

They need to create a relationship and environment where they will be able to hear/accept their child's disclosure. They need to be aware that children will often find it very challenging to share what has happened to them and they need to consider that the absence or retraction of a disclosure is not evidence that abuse has not happened.

Supporting them to share information about the risk with the wider family and friends network, if there are safe and supportive people around them can increase the safety network around the child. We need to be mindful of any other risk posing adults within the network or historical experiences of abuse before doing this.

Scenario

Scenario planning can be a useful way of considering with the family what the risk may look like and how they and we may respond in future situations

Identify and describe the most plausible scenarios for potential future sexual abuse around this child. It can be helpful to identify a scenario that is similar to the original offence or allegation and then also one that is different to help the family consider how offenders may adapt their offending. We would recommend exploring one example at a time considering the following:

Nature of further offence

What type of sexual offence is most likely; Internet offending/contact offence? who is the most likely victim; the subject child/ another relative or friend?

Severity:

How harmful would this offence be to the victim and others? Could the offending behaviours escalate overtime (based on offender's previous patterns of behaviours)?

Imminence:

How soon is an offence likely to reoccur? Are there protective factors now that could reduce in the future? Will the risk to the children change as they grow older?

Frequency:

How often are offences likely to occur? How does this fit with previous patterns of behaviour?

Likelihood:

In general based on this offenders behaviour how likely is it that further abuse will occur?

What will the perpetrator need to do to reduce the possibility of these example scenarios, what can the protective parent do to reduce the opportunity and what would professionals need to do in these events. This can be a helpful way for the family to be able to visualise safety planning and how to reduce the opportunity to cause harm.

Further Reading /Guidance

If you need further guidance/consultation please contact joanne.millyard@westsussex.gov.uk to arrange. The discussion will be more effective if you are able to bring some knowledge of the contributing factors.

Community Care Inform, Sexual Abuse Knowledge and Practice hub
<https://www.ccinform.co.uk/knowledge-hubs/child-sexual-abuse-knowledge-and-practice-hub/>

NSPCC
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-abuse/>

Stop it Now
<https://www.stopitnow.org.uk/>

Consultation, Assessment & Treatment Service (CATS), West Sussex (formally ATS). Working with children and young people who engage in Harmful Sexual Behaviour. New Park House, Horsham, West Sussex, RH12 1RJ : 01403 223268