



Centre of
expertise
on child
sexual abuse

Improving the identification and response to child sexual abuse

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23rd March 2026

The CSA Centre

We are the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre). We want children to be able to live **free from the threat and harm of sexual abuse**.

Our aim is to reduce the impact of child sexual abuse through improved prevention and better response.

We are a **multi-disciplinary team** that works closely with key partners from academic institutions, local authorities, health, education, police and the voluntary sector.



Reminder: Looking after yourself – health warning

Sexual abuse can be difficult to think about and talk about. Thinking about it and talking about it will affect us all in **different ways**, at **different times**.

It is important that we...

- Be aware of the feelings and experiences of other delegates
- Be kind to ourselves (personally and professionally)
- Respect each other's learning journey

What we will cover in this session



Setting the context



“I wanted them all to notice” and the challenges in practice



Resources to support practice

“Why did nobody ask me?”

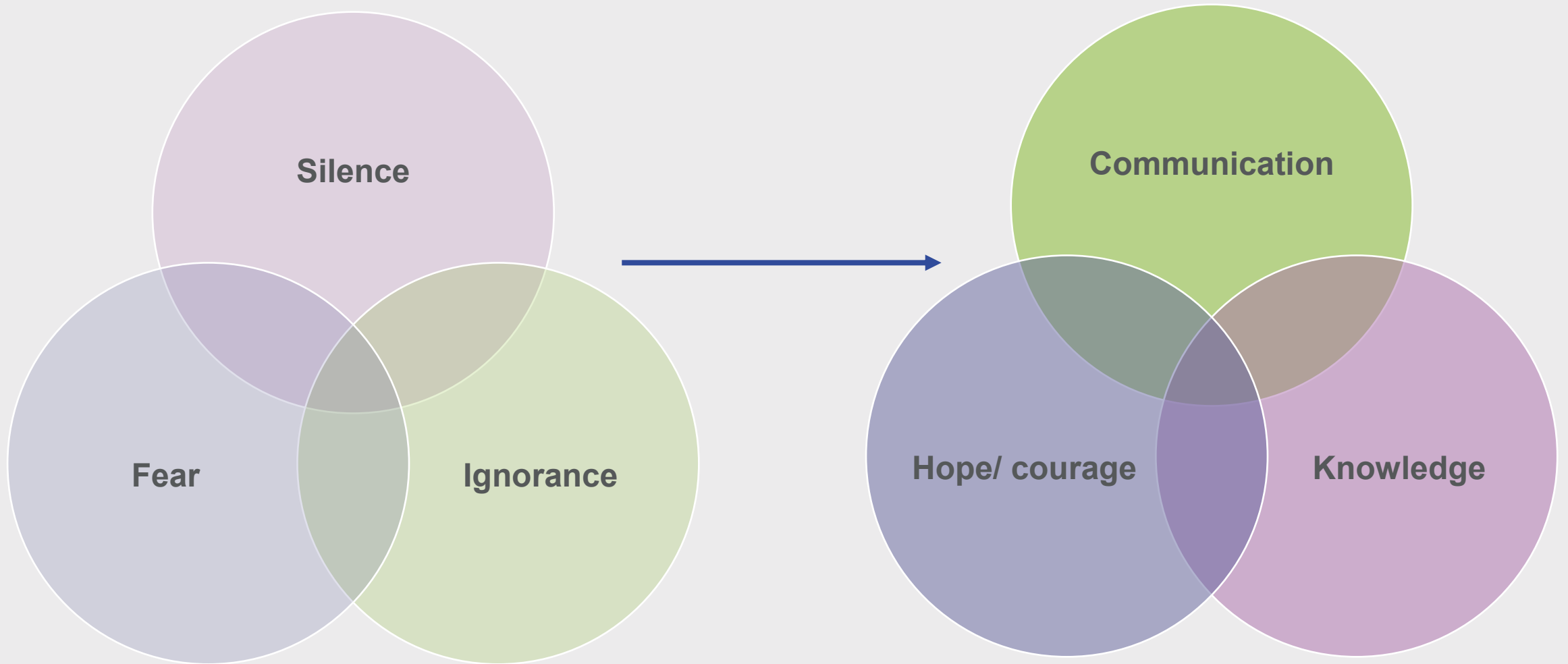
(Simon, care leaver, aged 20)

Professionals are being held back by...



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When we need hope, communication and knowledge



Understanding the different contexts of offending

Child sexual abuse within the family environment

Child sexual abuse through attack by an unknown person

Child sexual abuse through trusted relationships outside the family environment

Child sexual abuse through a personal connection

Child sexual abuse through an intermediary

Child sexual abuse arranged and perpetrated for payment

Child sexual abuse through online interaction

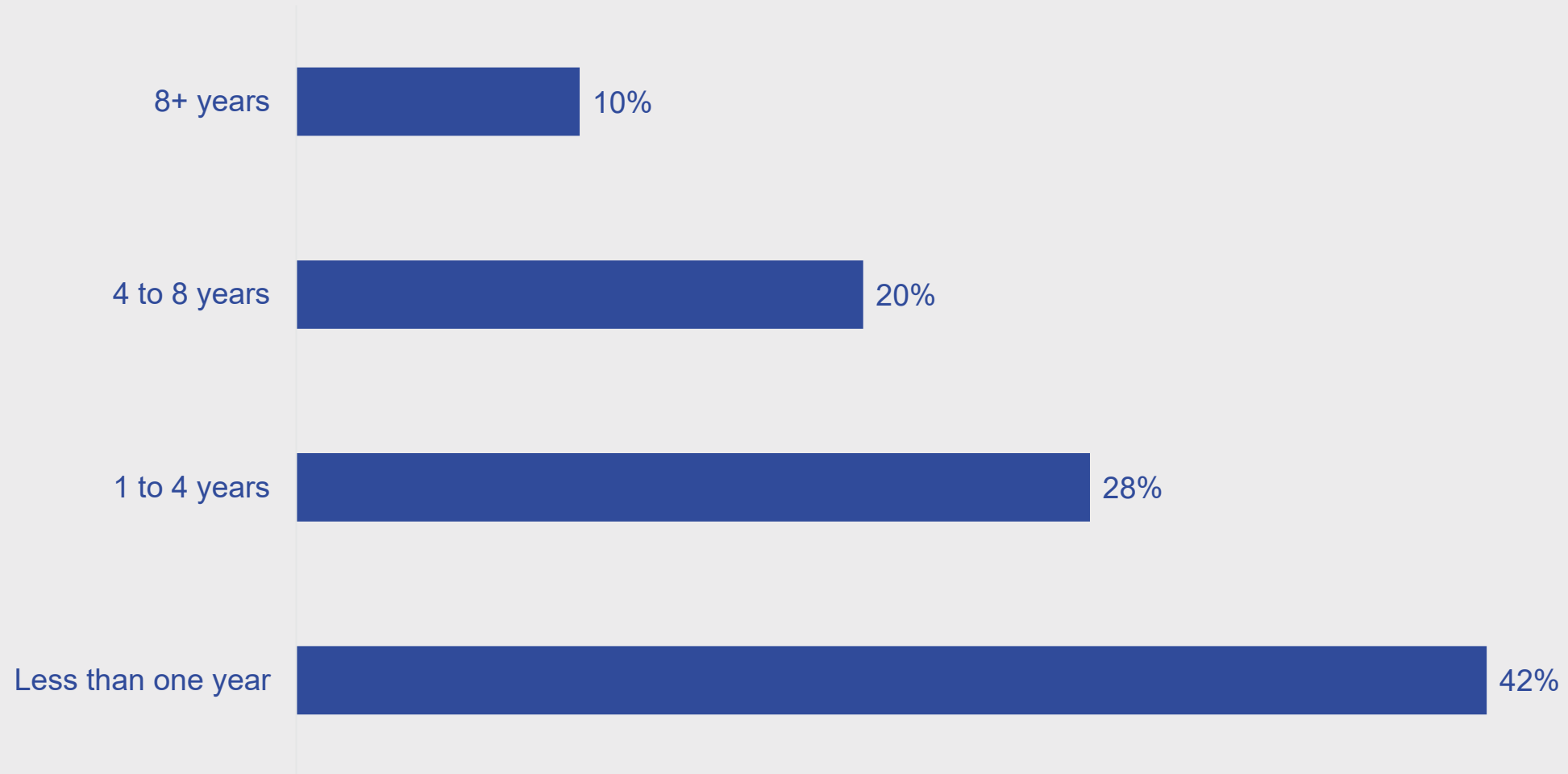
Child sexual abuse through groups and networks

Child sexual abuse through viewing, sharing or possessing images

The scale and nature of child sexual abuse

What is the data telling us?

Duration of rape / penetrative abuse



Vulnerabilities in the child's environment

Factors which increase the opportunities for abuse to occur include:

- Children who live in conditions of neglect are **five times more likely** to be sexually abused than those with no experience of neglect.
- Children who spend time in residential care are **four times more likely** to be (or have been) sexually abused than those who live only in a family home.
- Disabled children are **at least twice as likely** as non-disabled children to be targeted by abusers.



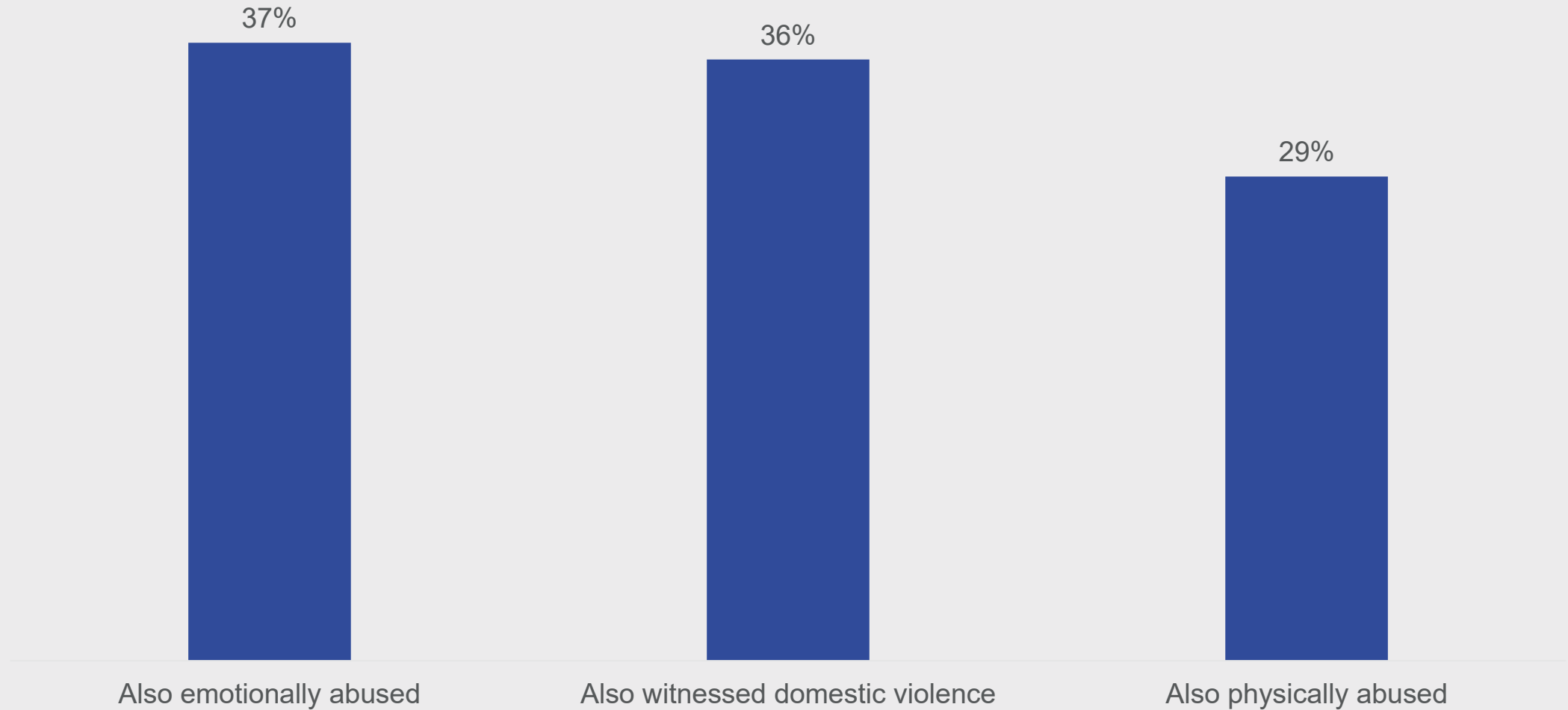
Vulnerabilities in the child's environment



Factors which increase the pressure on families and can undermine their ability to protect children. Including:

- Children who live in a household with someone misusing alcohol or drugs are **three times more likely** to be sexually abused than children not exposed to parental substance misuse.
- **Over a half of children** who are sexually abused also experience other forms of child abuse, most frequently emotional abuse or experiencing domestic abuse.

Overlaps with other forms of child abuse: Including emotional abuse, physical abuse or domestic abuse



Far more children are sexually abused than services identify

Child sexual abuse in 2023/24: Trends in official data
csacentre.org.uk



2,200 children on a child protection plan due to child sexual abuse (England)

10,500 children seen by sexual assault referral centres (England and Wales)

45,000 children assessed at risk of sexual abuse* (England)

101,000 child sexual abuse offences recorded by the police (England and Wales)

500,000

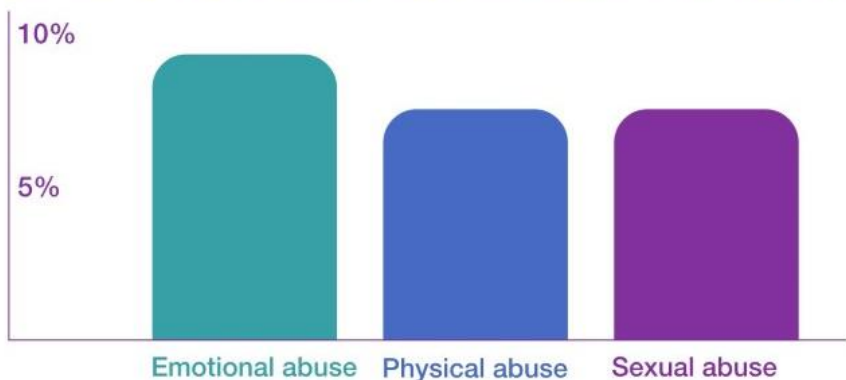
children are estimated to be sexually abused every year**

Sources: Home Office, Police recorded crime and outcomes, 2023/24; Department for Education, Characteristics of Children in Need, 2023/24; NHS England 2025. *Includes assessments recording concerns of child sexual abuse and exploitation.** Estimate calculated using single-year prevalence estimated by age group (Radford et al. 2011, Childhood abuse and neglect in the UK today) and the Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates, 2023. Please note: numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred/thousand.

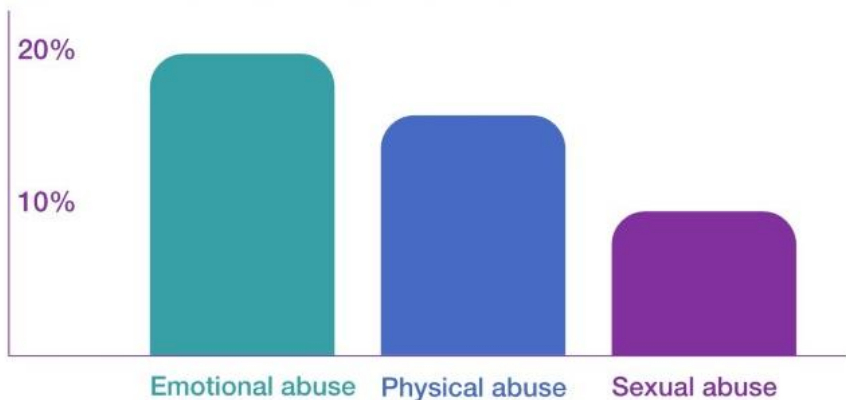
Sexual abuse is just as common as other forms of childhood abuse

But concerns of sexual abuse are far less likely to be identified and named

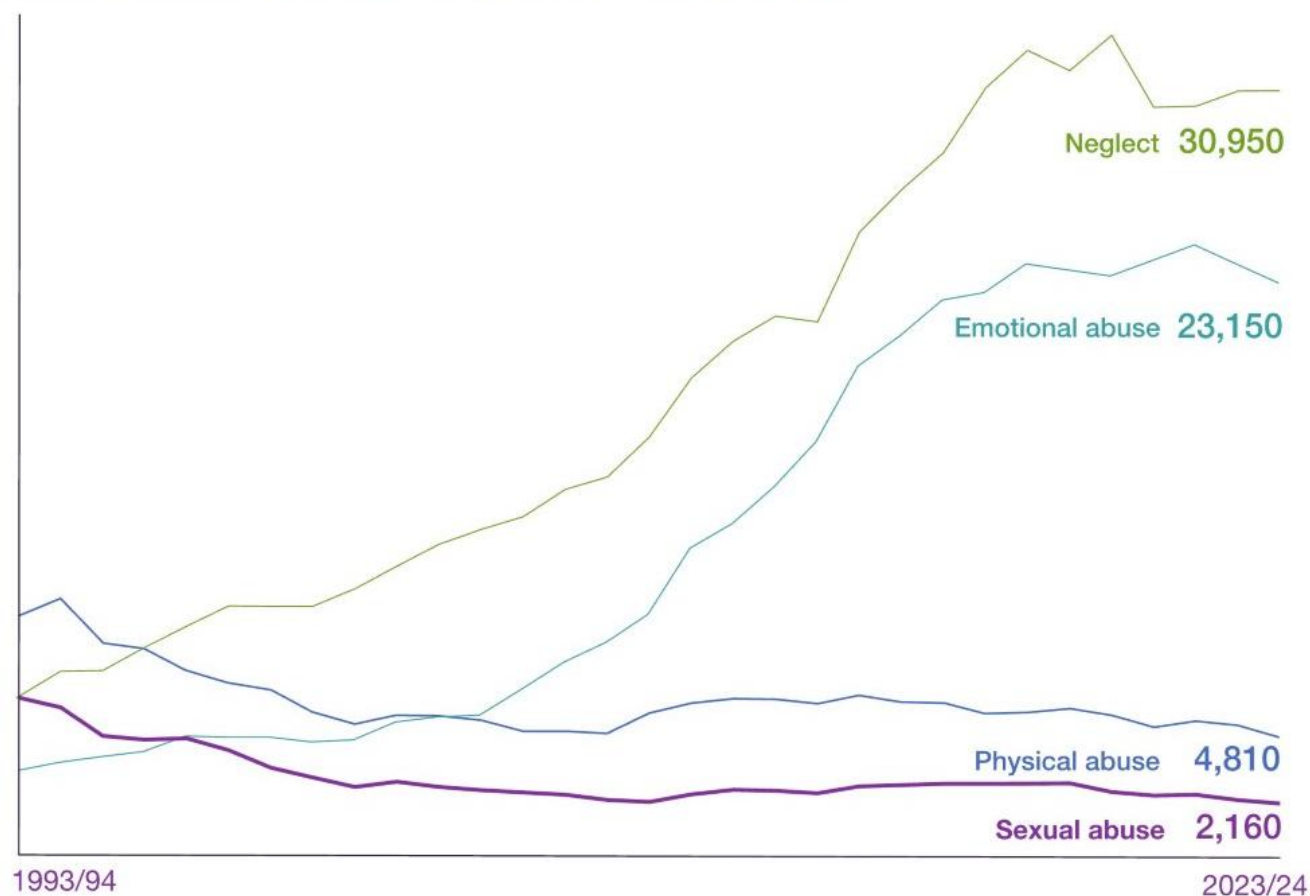
Similar levels of child abuse are identified in surveys



...but lower levels of child sexual abuse are identified in child in need assessments



Number of child protection plans by form of abuse



The Data Insights Hub

Local and national data on child sexual abuse in England & Wales

The Data Insights Hub is our **interactive online dashboard** designed to enable professionals, commissioners and researchers to find, understand and use official data on child sexual abuse.

Using interactive maps and charts, the Data Insights Hub displays official data from local authorities and police forces, alongside up-to-date estimates on the scale of child sexual abuse, **all in one place.**



csacentre.org.uk/data-insights-hub/

Explore the data on child sexual abuse

View **official data** on child sexual abuse recorded by local authorities and police forces.

You can see the trends over time and find out how your latest data compares with data from similar areas.

[Safeguarding data by local authority](#) →

[Recorded crime data by police force](#) →

Compare the official data with the estimated **scale of child sexual abuse** in your local area, and see the number of **support services** for children affected by sexual abuse.

[Scale and support services by local authority](#) →

[Scale and support services by police force](#) →

Official safeguarding data by local authority

Select the indicator

- Assessments: child sexual abuse
- Assessments: child sexual exploitation
- Child protection plan/register: sexual abuse

Drawing on official data from the [Department for Education](#) this page includes for England:

- Data on the ‘factors’ identified during **needs assessments of children** referred to local authority children’s services in England. You can view the number of assessments that recorded ‘**child sexual abuse**’ or ‘**child sexual exploitation**’ as a factor.
- Data on the reasons for placing **children on child protection plans**: this shows the number of cases where the **primary reason was recorded as ‘sexual abuse’**.

The map shows the the number of **assessments and child protection plans/registrations per 1,000 children aged 0-17** living in each local authority. By showing the numbers in relation to child population, we can compare local authorities of different sizes. The number indicates the level of *identification or recording* of child sexual abuse, not the scale of that abuse.

Data for Wales for the period 2024/25 is not yet publicly available.

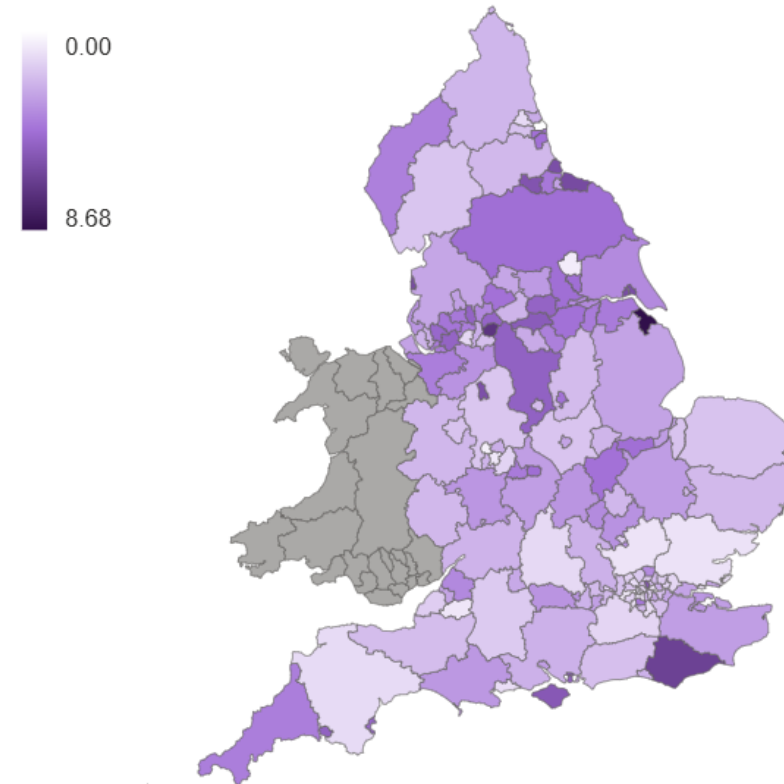
For more information about this data, see the [Technical note](#).

← Main menu

Local data →

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England: number per 1,000 children 0-17, 2024/25 (Assessments: child sexual abuse)



Scroll to zoom. The darker the colour, the greater the number of assessments or child protection plans/registrations per 1,000 children living in the local authority area. Very low numbers are suppressed for data protection reasons and marked as '0'.

In all areas of England and Wales most child sexual abuse does not come to the local authority's attention – to see an estimate of the number of children who were sexually abused in your local authority area, see [Data on scale and support services](#)

Local safeguarding data

Select a local authority

Norfolk

Select the indicator

- Assessments: child sexual abuse
- Assessments: child sexual exploitation
- Child protection plan/register: sexual abuse

This page draws on official data from the [Department for Education](#).

The first chart shows the **number** of assessments or child protection plans related to child sexual abuse in your selected local authority **per 1,000 children** living in the area. This number is compared with demographically similar local authorities ('[statistical neighbours](#)') in England.

The second chart presents the **actual number** of assessments or child protection plans related to child sexual abuse in your selected local authority over time. **Numbers below 6 are marked as 'C'** for data protection reasons.

Data for Wales for the period 2024/25 is not yet publicly available.

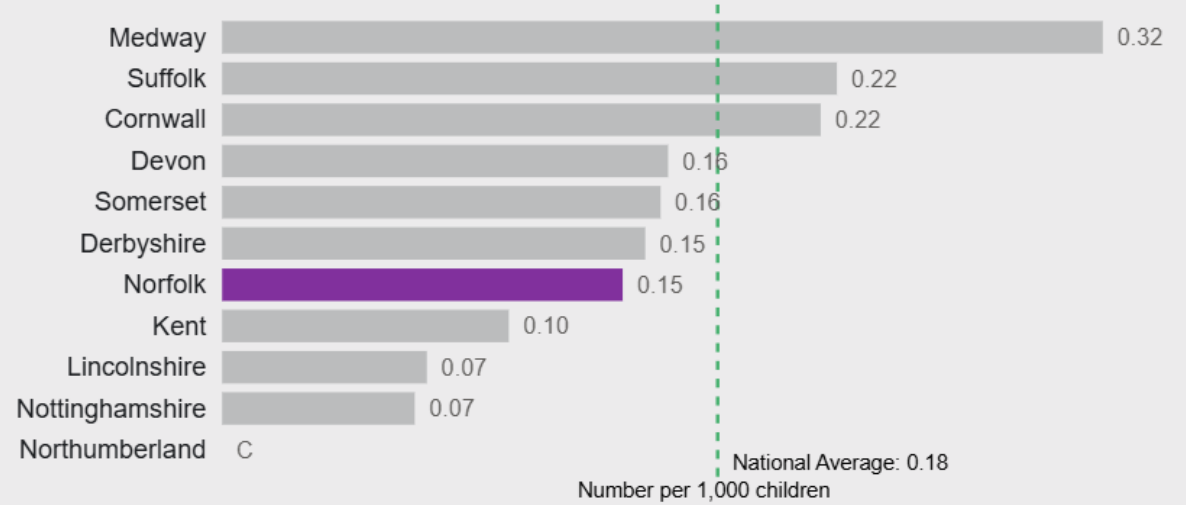
The numbers indicate the level of *identification or recording* of child sexual abuse, not the scale of that abuse. For more information about this data, see the [Technical note](#).

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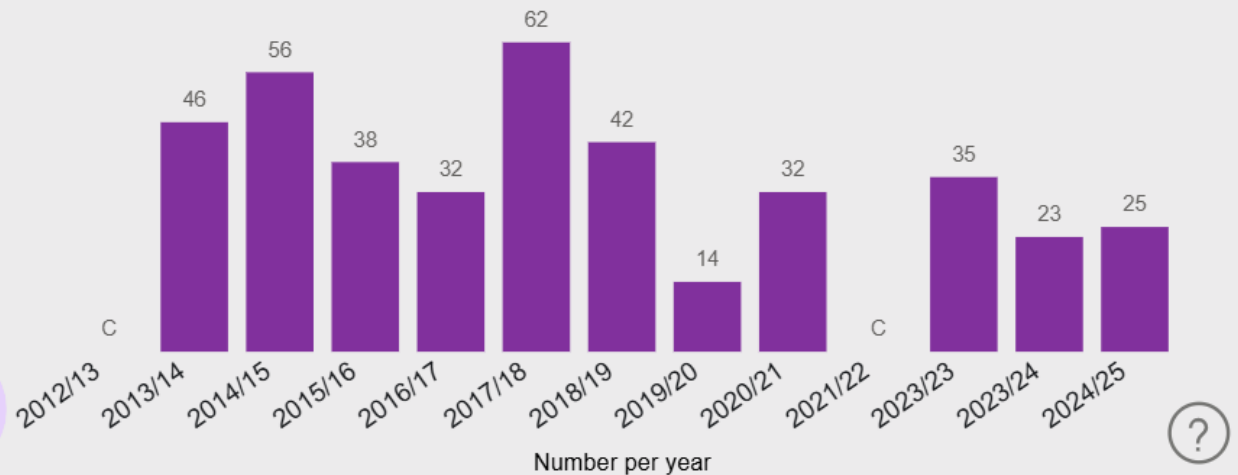
← National data

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Norfolk & statistical neighbours (Child protection plan/register: sexual abuse)



Trends over time: Norfolk (Child protection plan/register: sexual abuse)



Select a local authority

Norfolk



This page compares the estimated scale of child sexual abuse with the official data on child sexual abuse recorded by your selected local authority, and where possible, with the recorded offences from the local police force. The crime data is only available when your selected local authority covers the same geographical area as the relevant police force. In all other cases **this data is not publicly available and is marked as 'N/A'**.

Social care data for Wales is not currently available.

Below the iceberg you can see how many support services respond to sexually abused children in the area. **To see the details of the services in your area, [click here](#).**

For data sources and further information, [click here](#).

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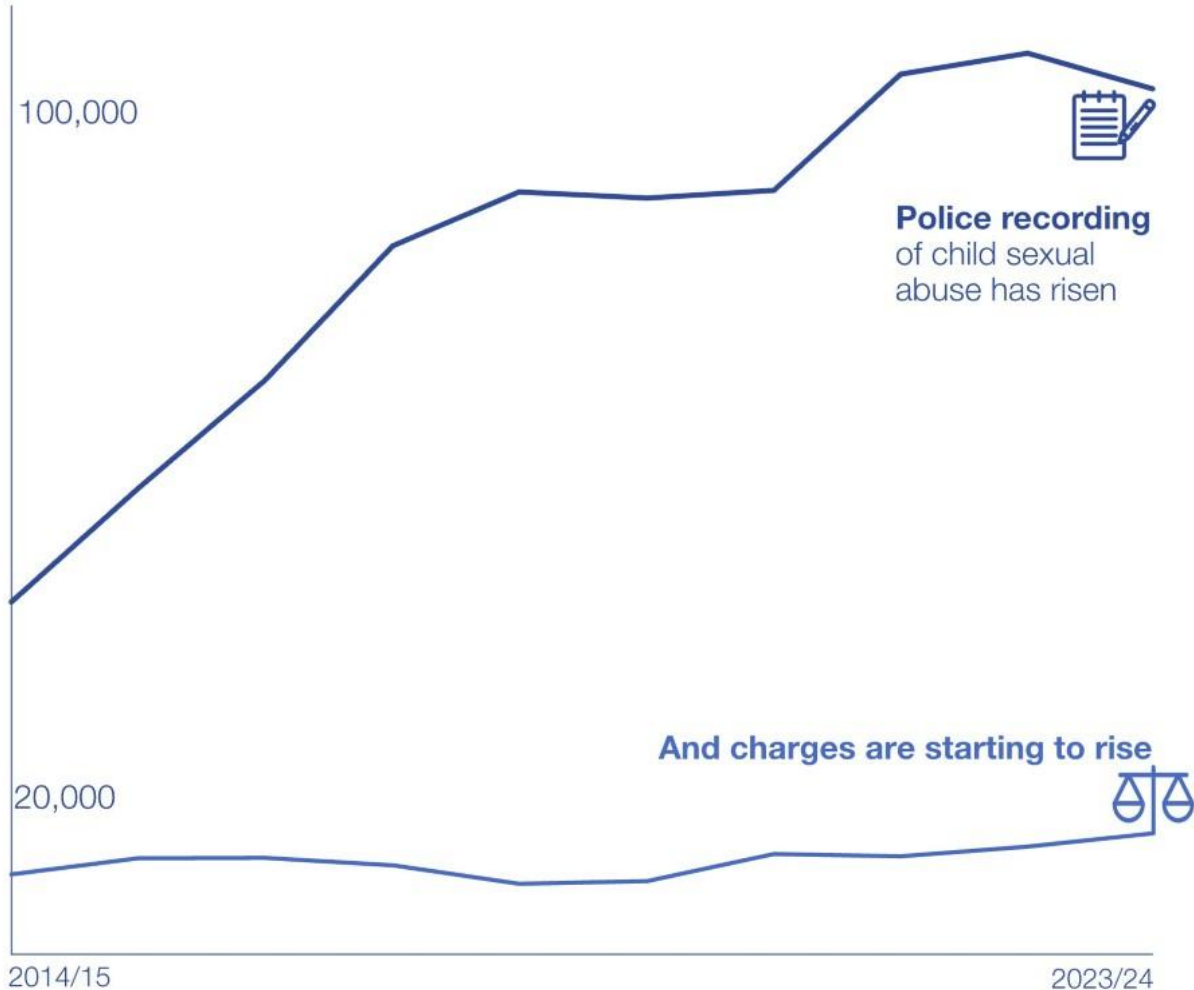
Far more children are sexually abused than statutory services identify in Norfolk



There are 7 support services that respond to the sexual abuse of children living in Norfolk.



More recording of child sexual abuse but it takes longer to complete at court



Average time from recording to charge



Average time from charge to completion at court



The time taken for a case to progress from charge to completion has increased by 29% while time from recording to charge has fallen slightly.

Challenges in practice

“I wanted them all to notice”:

The National Panel report, findings and recommendations

THE CHILD
SAFEGUARDING
PRACTICE REVIEW PANEL

“I wanted them all to notice”

Protecting children and responding
to child sexual abuse within the
family environment

November 2024

The findings of this national review highlight a **systemic failure across all services** to recognise and respond when children are at risk of, or are already, being sexually abused by someone in their family environment.

“I wanted them all to notice”

Not hearing children’s voices and understanding their needs

Understanding parents’ and carers’ contexts, vulnerabilities and needs

Challenges in identifying signs, understanding risk and raising concerns

Issues in responding to concerns of intrafamilial child sexual abuse

Recommendations for safeguarding partners

Strategic
planning

Professional
knowledge,
skills and
confidence

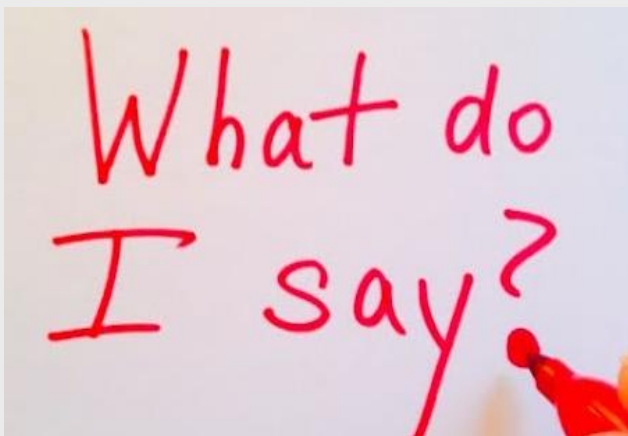
Enquiries and
investigations

Assessment of
people
presenting risk
of sexual harm

Talking to
children

Health

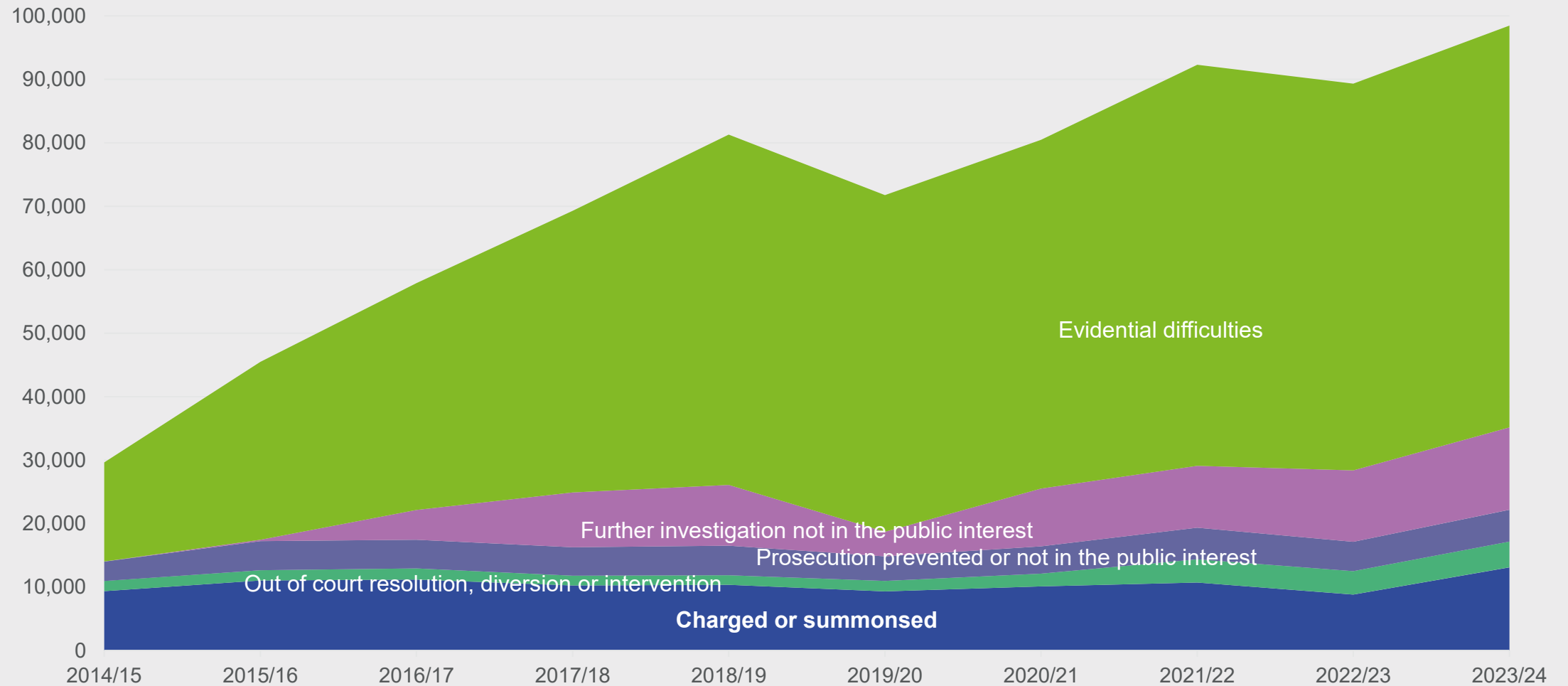
The obstacle of fear



It can feel like a bit of a minefield

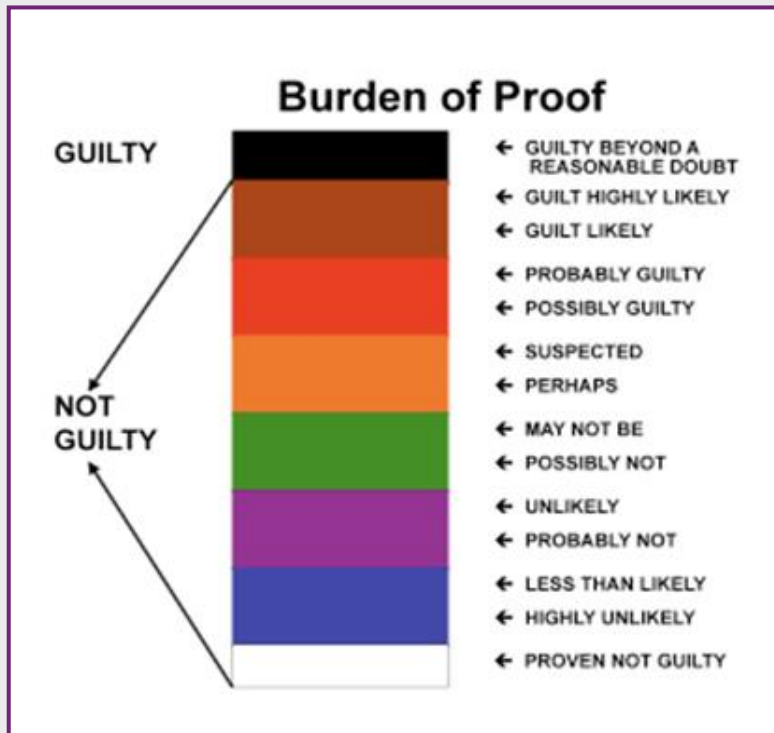
...Asking questions

Investigation outcomes of child sexual abuse offences, 2014/15-2023/24



The Burden of Proof

Beyond Reasonable Doubt



Balance of Probabilities



The implications of a 'no further action' decision

An NFA decision from Police/CPS has undue influence over the remainder of the system's response to children

- *The police have taken NFA so there's nothing we can do*
- *There's no evidence the child has been abused*
- *The child made must have made this up*
- *I can't say I believe the child if there is no evidence for it*
- *There is no evidence this child was previously abused*
- *We can't refer to specialist help as there's no evidence it happened*
- *The family won't work with us now, and we don't have the evidence to make them*

Recommendation 3: Enquiries and Investigations



Safeguarding partners to audit and review local guidance and practice so that a **clear distinction is made** between thresholds about significant harm to a child and those influencing criminal investigations.

At the conclusion of section 47 enquiries and police investigations, there is a **multi-agency discussion** to consider risk to the children and how they will be protected and supported.

Where the harm has been perpetrated by a sibling, plans must be made for all the children in the family, addressing the needs of the child who has harmed as well as the child who has been harmed, and any other siblings.

The term 'no further action' should not be used in these circumstances as it is too often understood to mean the abuse did not happen. The term '**no further police action at this time**' is more appropriate.

There should **be a clear record of why** a criminal investigation has been closed and that this information has been shared with other relevant agencies.

The evidence: Sexual abuse is rarely 'clear cut'

How can we 'absolutely know' abuse has taken place?

- Clear disclosure...repeated at least twice
- Medical evidence of sexual harm
- Admission of guilt from perpetrator
- Witnessed by someone else
- Images/computer records of the abuse exist

Rarely will we reach a position of 'absolute knowing'



Building a picture of concerns



Safeguarding decisions must be based on all indicators of sexual abuse and should not rely solely on verbal statements from children

Recommendation 3: Enquiries and Investigations

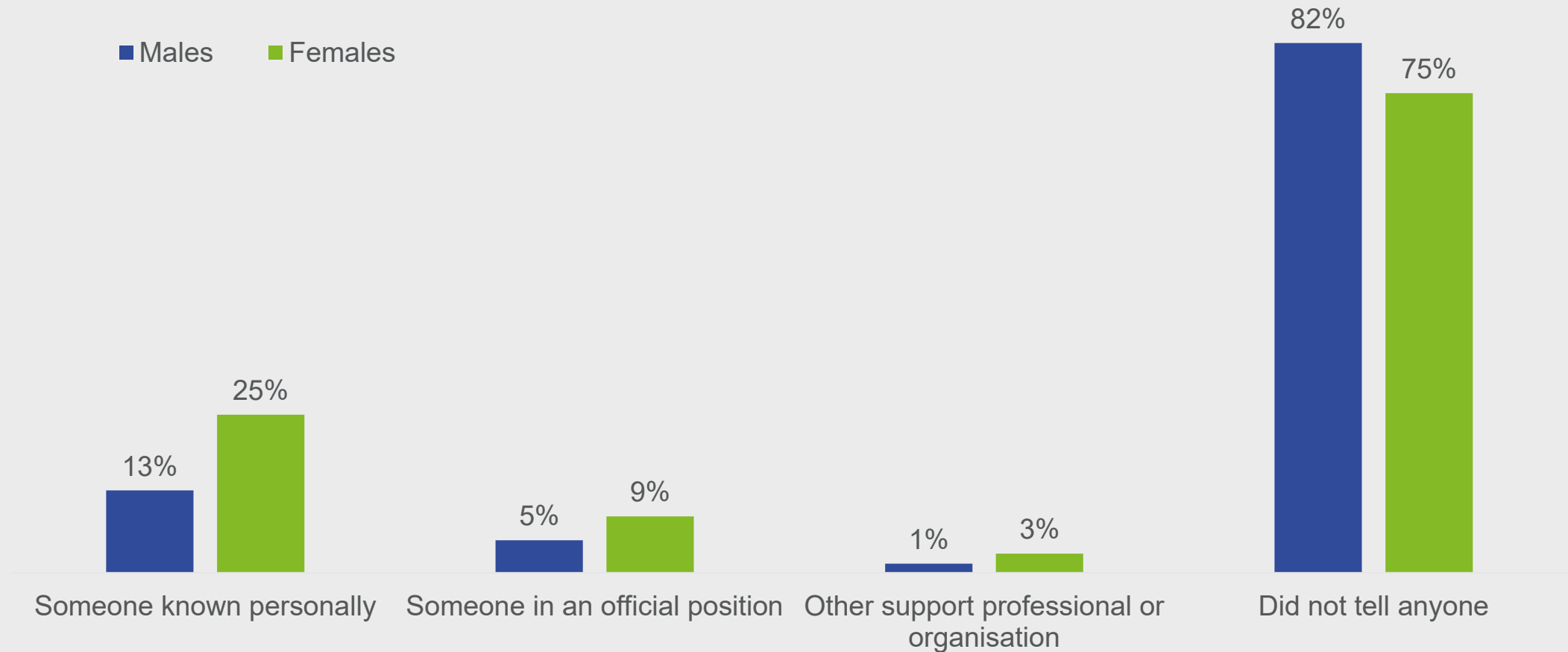


Children are much more likely to show us, rather than tell us what is going on for them

“Professionals rely too heavily on children to verbally disclose”

Report into Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment, JTAI 2020

Who was told at the time

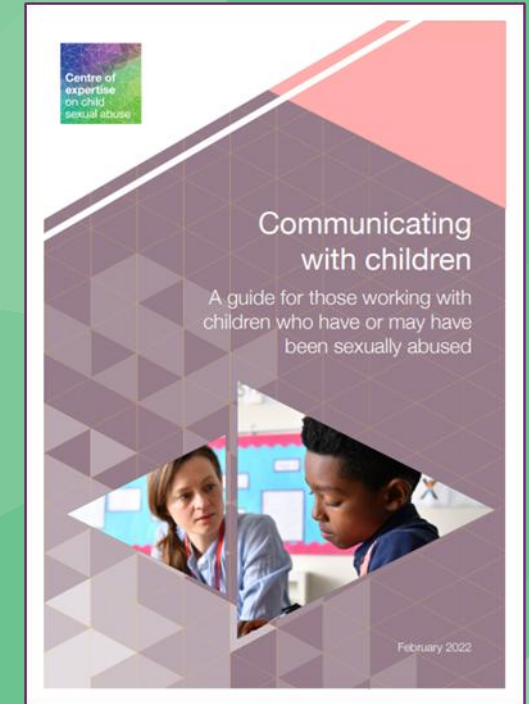




Recommendation 5: Talking to children

Government should ensure that practitioners understand that they **can and should talk directly to children**, and families, about concerns of sexual abuse.

Safeguarding partners should take necessary steps to ensure that all practitioners in their area (including foster carers) understand and are confident in talking directly to children, and families, about concerns of sexual abuse, taking due account of ethnicity, language and disability.

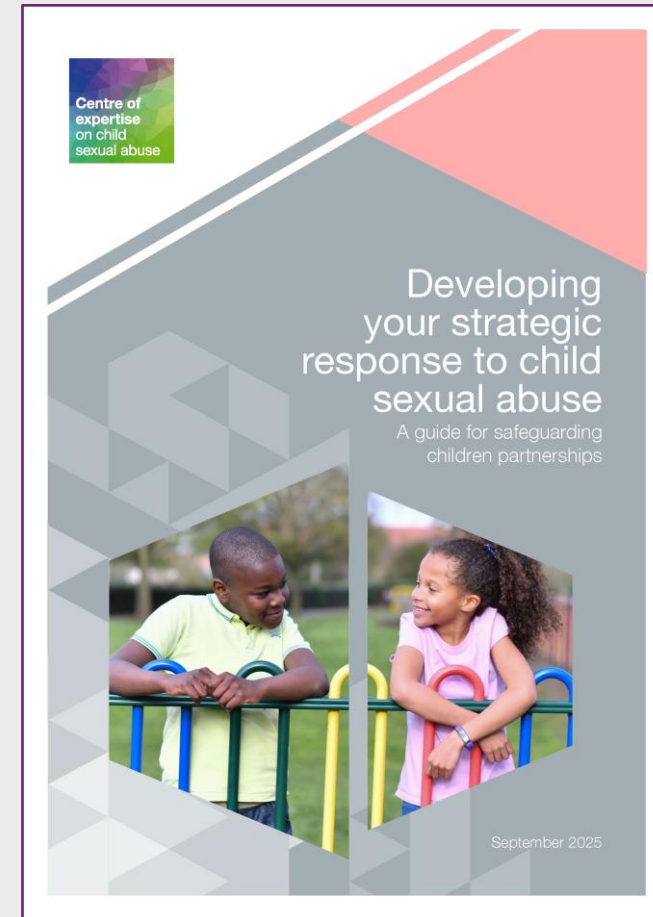


Resources to support practice

Developing your strategic response to child sexual abuse

This guide enables **safeguarding children partnerships** to develop an effective, evidence-based strategy to address all forms of child sexual abuse

By using this guide, partnerships can **build a shared vision** of their response to child sexual abuse, and each agency can **confidently take ownership** of their strategy, understand the role they play in the overall response, and know where **accountability** sits



Recommendation 2: Professional knowledge, skills and confidence

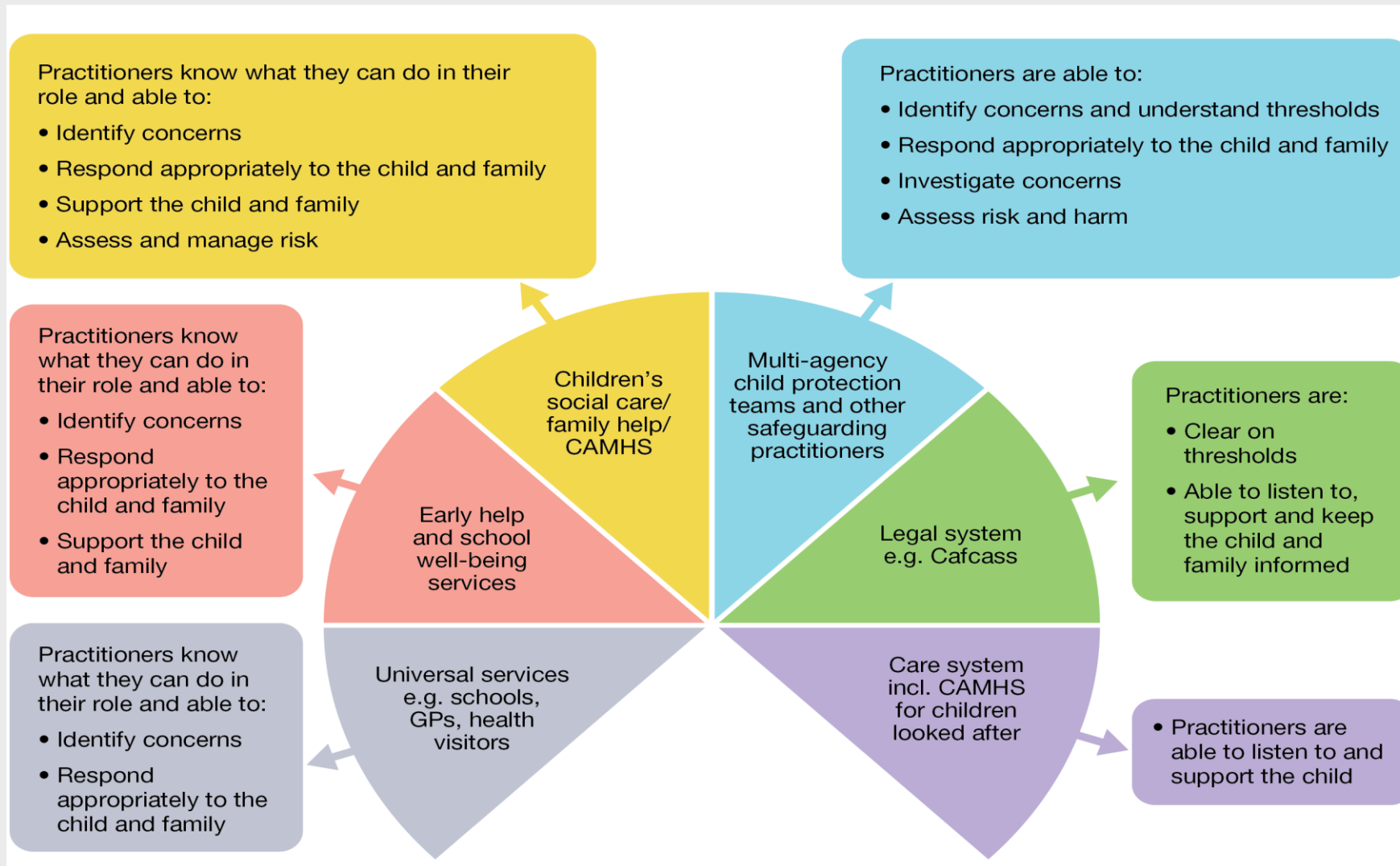
Safeguarding partners should undertake a **multi-agency training needs assessment**, to ensure that their practitioners are able to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in this area. This should include the achieving best evidence joint training.

The response to this assessment may require **multi-agency and single-agency training initiatives**, in a range of formats, supported by evidence informed resources.

They should additionally give specific attention to the **role of schools, early years and other education settings** and how they can identify and help children affected by child sexual abuse.



Support and protection across the spectrum of need



Knowledge gaps (identified in the Panel report)

Communicating with children about child sexual abuse

Communicating with families about child sexual abuse

How domestic abuse and coercive control impacts parental capacity to protect

The signs and indicators of child sexual abuse

The signs and indicators of sexually abusive behaviour

Risk assessment

Thresholds for intervention

What you need to know about child sexual abuse.

- How common is child sexual abuse?
- How and where child sexual abuse happens
- People who sexually abuse children
- Vulnerabilities to child sexual abuse
- Identifying child sexual abuse
- How to respond to children
- Talking to children about sexual abuse
- Impacts of child sexual abuse
- Family support following sexual abuse
- People can and do recover
- Helpful resources



<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-resources/need-to-know-child-sexual-abuse/>

eLearning course:

Identifying and responding to intra-familial child sexual abuse

This course is designed for **anyone working with children** to understand what intra-familial child sexual abuse is, provide guidance on how to identify concerns and build knowledge and confidence in how to respond to support both the children and their wider family.

For professionals at **all stages of their career**; for those without any training on child sexual abuse, or as a helpful refresher.

It is **completely free** and should take no more than **90 minutes** to complete.

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www.csacentre.org.uk/training/elearning



The Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway

An interactive online resource to guide professionals through how they can protect and support children and their families when there are concerns of sexual abuse.

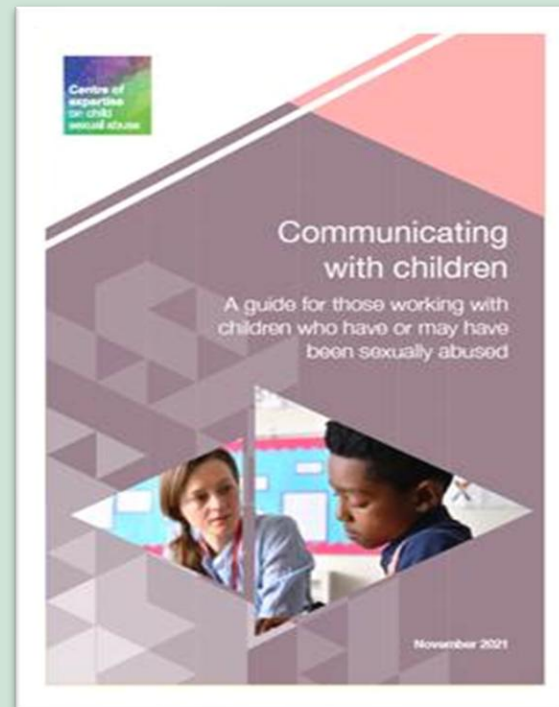
- The Response Pathway sets out **how to respond to concerns of child sexual abuse at key points**: from first concerns and early help safeguarding through to child protection and criminal justice. Throughout, the Response Pathway focuses on meeting the needs of children and their families.
- It is designed to **empower professionals** to understand the role they, and their colleagues, can play to best protect and support children. It doesn't just tell professionals what to do, **it helps them to understand how to do it.**



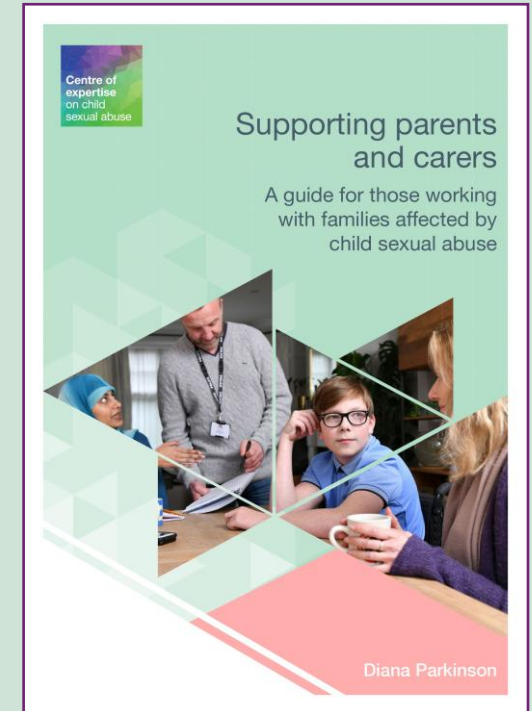
<http://www.csacentre.org.uk/response-pathway>



A template for professionals to identify and record concerns of child sexual abuse



A guide for professionals working with children who have or may have been sexually abused



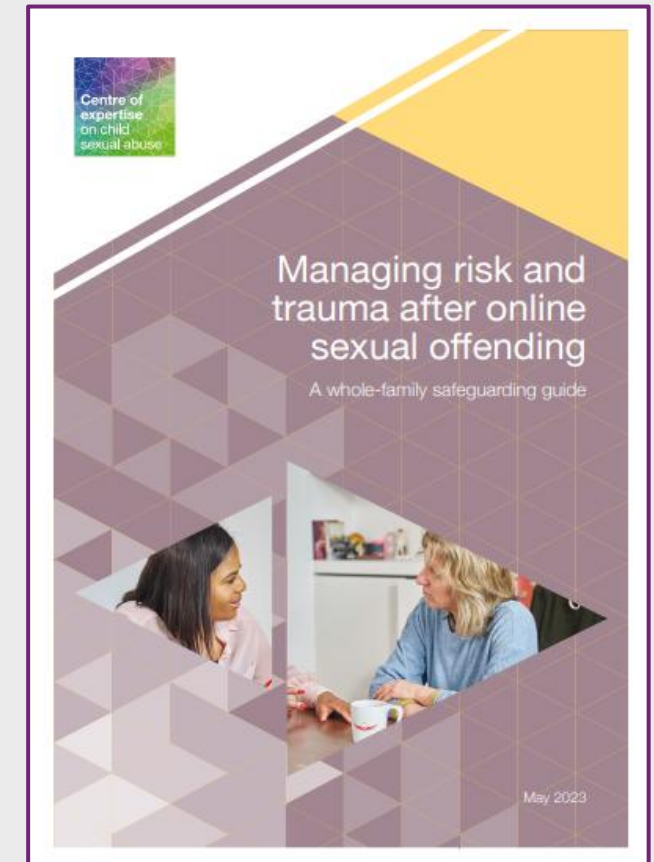
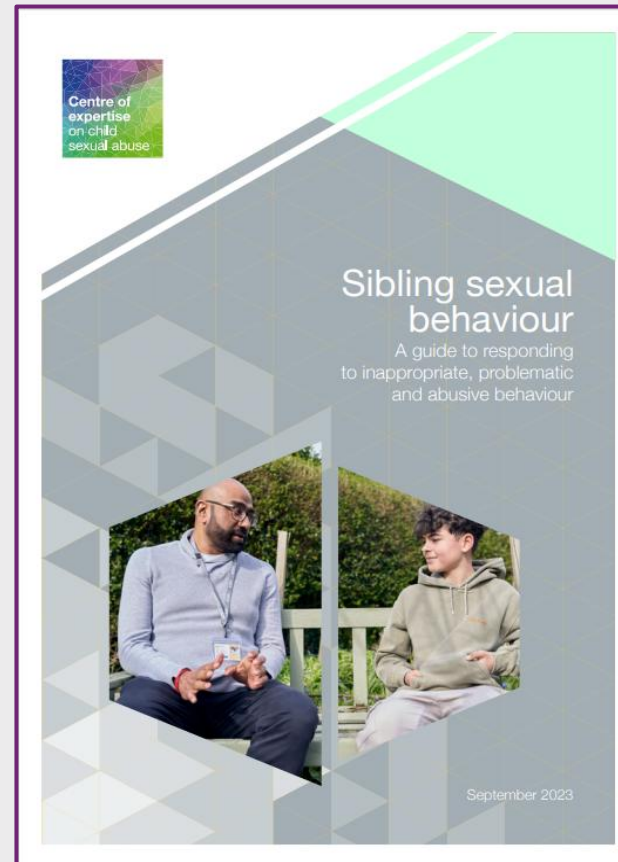
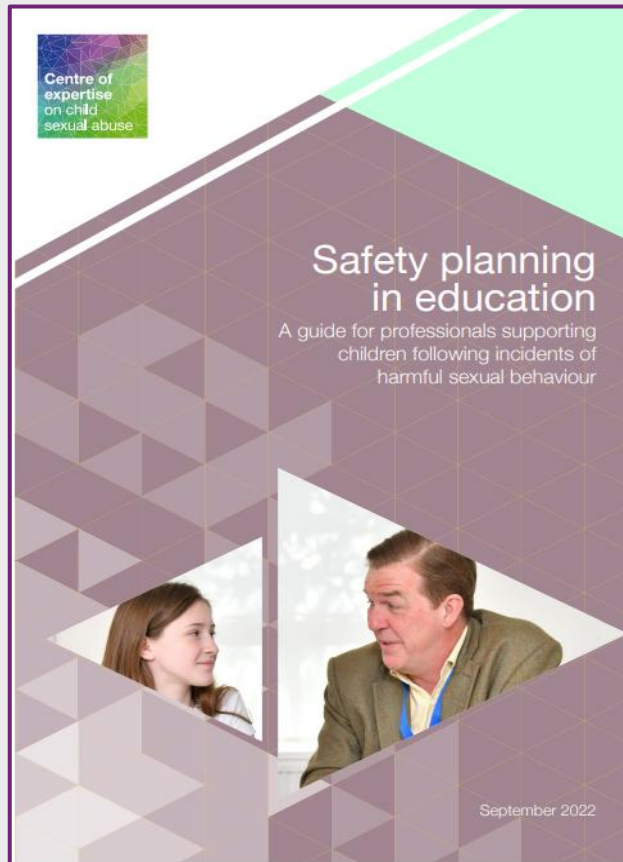
A guide for professionals working with families affected by child sexual abuse

<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-resources/practice-resources/>

Supporting practice film series

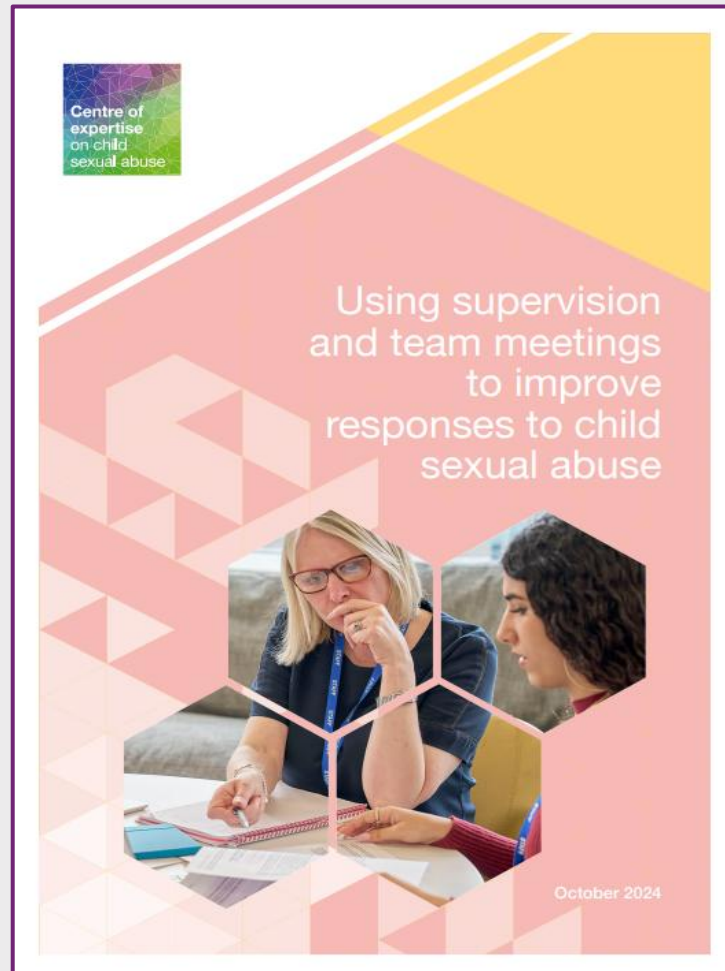
12 short films, building on our resources, to give professionals the confidence to identify and respond to concerns of child sexual abuse.

More practice resources



<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-resources/practice-resources/>

Supporting line managers



Our **Using supervision and team meetings to improve responses to child sexual abuse** guide helps professionals **start discussions** about child sexual abuse within their teams, **reflect on** the experiences of children and families they are working with, **explore** their team's and their own **welfare**, and consider how the evidence might inform and **develop their practice**.

Free to download:

<http://www.csacentre.org.uk/knowledge-in-practice/practice-improvement/>

Key messages from research

What are they?

- Succinct, relevant information for frontline practitioners and commissioners
- The most up-to-date research to support confident provision of the best possible responses, in one accessible overview

Topics include:

- Impacts of child sexual abuse
- Child sexual abuse in institutional contexts
- Looked-after children and child sexual abuse
- Children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour



<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-resources/key-messages/>

Find a support service



Being able to access support, as a child, young person or adult, is crucial to mitigating the impacts of child sexual abuse.

To help make this easier, the CSA Centre has created a directory containing **over 350 child sexual abuse support services in England and Wales.**

The **accessible, searchable Support Services Directory** is a simple way for victims and survivors, their families, or professionals, to find services that can help.

Find support services and get help today.

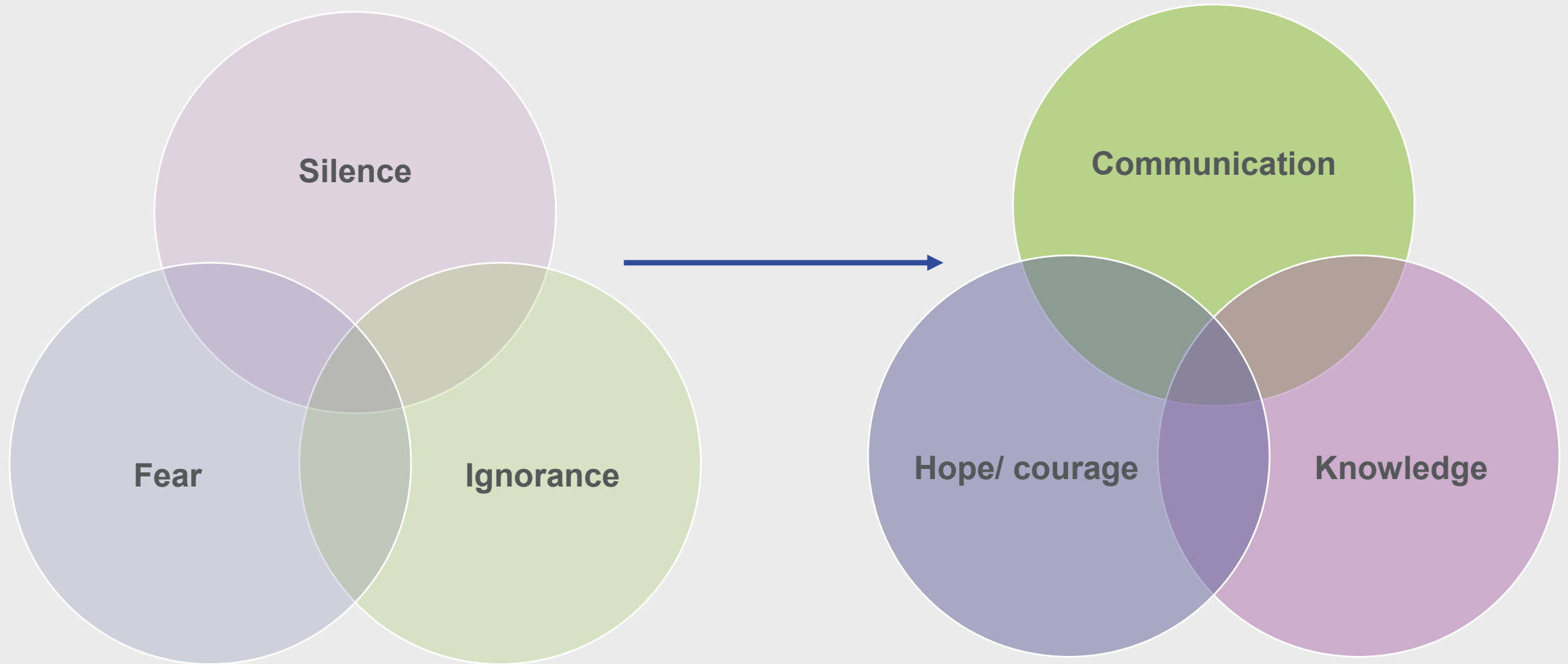
csacentre.org.uk/get-support/

Stop It Now Helpline

If you are worried about your own thoughts or behaviours or are worried about the behaviours of someone around you, you can contact the **Stop It Now Helpline** for **free, confidential advice:**

0808 1000 900

When we need hope, communication and knowledge



Together, we have collective strength

“Remember there are always far more people who want to protect children than those who want to abuse them. We should use – and be heartened by – the great potential in collective strength”.

(Sarah Nelson, 2016)

Any questions?



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Thank you

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