



Building
stronger
families

YOUNG PERSON'S Information Booklet

Age 12 and upwards

Many thanks to the Leicester PSA team in producing this booklet.

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Family Action is a national charity that helps families across the UK.

The Post Sexual Abuse (PSA) service started in April 1996 and covers Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

About this booklet

We have created this booklet to give information and advice to young people who have experienced sexual abuse. It has been created through talking to young people and from the PSA service's many years' of experience.

If you have experienced sexual abuse, either recently or in the past, we hope this booklet will help you on your journey.

Ethnicity and diversity

Child sexual abuse (CSA) happens in every part of our society, every culture and religion from the rich to the poor. We work with young people from all backgrounds and are interested in you as a whole person, not just in what has happened to you. We know that young people from different ethnic backgrounds may have extra barriers in their way that make it more difficult to disclose what has happened to them and then to find support. Family Action's PSA service takes into consideration your identity, culture, background and religion when working with you.

Disabled young people

Disabled young people can be more vulnerable to abuse and can also have extra barriers in their way that make it difficult to disclose if they are being, or have been, abused. The PSA service is interested in you and takes into account your additional needs when working with you.

What is sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse (CSA) happens to boys and girls. It is when a child or young person is pressurized, forced or tricked into taking part in any kind of sexual activity with an adult or young person. This does not have to be through physical contact and can happen online. Abuse can happen at any age and it can happen once or many times. It might have happened recently or a long time ago.

Sexual abuse includes:

- familial abuse by a family member or by someone who is like a family member to you
- sibling abuse by a brother or sister or step brother or sister
- online abuse
- peer abuse by someone of a similar age to you
- rape
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is when a young person is targeted by someone who has more power than them. It often involves receiving something (such as a mobile phone, clothes, drugs or alcohol, attention or affection) before or after becoming involved in sexual activities. In this situation a young person can often believe that they are in a relationship. However, they have been targeted by another person/people with some power or control over them.

**Remember
the responsibility and blame for sexual
abuse, whether it takes place online or in
the real world, ALWAYS lies with the
adult or other young person who
has manipulated you.**

What is online abuse?

Online child sexual abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the internet through social networks, online games, web cams or by using mobile phones or other devices. You can be at risk from both people you know as well as from strangers. Online abuse may be part of abuse that is taking place in the real world or it may be that the abuse only happens online.

Online abuse can be called cyberbullying and might include being called sexual names, being forced to talk about a sexual experience, or being told sexual jokes. You may be tricked or coerced into sending sexual images or videos. A common feature of online CSA is the threat of having your sexual images or information shared with your friends and family. This can make it very difficult to tell anyone about what is happening.

It can feel like there is no escape from online abuse – you can be contacted anywhere, at any time of the day or night, and images and videos can be stored and shared with other people.

What is sexting?

Sexting is sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit messages or images, between devices (mobiles, laptops, tablets).

Be aware that it is against the law to take, share or have any sexually explicit images of anyone under the age of 18, even if this has happened with the consent of the other person.

**An NSPCC report in 2011
said that 1 in 20
children are sexually abused,
though many don't tell anyone.**

Barriers to telling

We know that it can be very difficult for children and young people to disclose that they are being sexually abused. Evidence gathered by research has shown the following barriers to telling:

- not expecting to be believed
- not recognising it as abuse
- self-blame and guilt
- fear of the abuser
- fear of the consequences and being judged
- loyalty to other family members
- lack of opportunities to tell someone
- distrust of professionals
- fear of family breakdown
- fear of bringing shame onto the family
- financial dependence on the abuser
- fear of being gossiped about or bullied
- loyalty towards the abuser and not wanting to get them into trouble
- avoiding difficult feelings (easier not to talk about it)
- shame/embarrassment/fear of stigma
- not knowing who to talk to
- abuser's popularity.

Why me? The grooming process

Why me? Did I do something to make this happen? You may be worried that there is something about you or about what you did that has caused the abuse to happen. However, we know from research that **abuse occurs because of the abuser, not the victim.**

- People who sexually abuse have big problems in how they think and behave sexually towards young people. They sexually abuse others because they want to and their behaviour is about satisfying their own needs.
- People who sexually abuse can be male or female. They can be any age and from any background.
- People who sexually abuse **plan** to do this beforehand. They know that their behaviour is unacceptable and, therefore, will manipulate others to keep it a secret. They may do this in lots of different ways by making threats to the victim or giving them treats and making them feel like the abuse is their fault.
- People who abuse will often isolate the person that they are abusing from others. They may make out that the victim is untrustworthy or a liar, making it hard for them to confide in anyone.
- Sexual abuse can occur over a long time. In the early stages a person who is being abused may not really understand what is happening to them and may be confused. Gradually, as time goes on, they may understand a bit more about what is happening, but find it harder to tell.

**We know that the majority of
children and young people are
sexually abused by someone they know.**

What happens after a disclosure?

Children's Services' social workers

The social worker's job is to speak with you about your disclosure of sexual abuse. They are responsible for making sure that you are safe and for trying to prevent further abuse from occurring. This may mean that they stay involved with you and your family. Social workers will always try to keep children at home with their families unless there are serious concerns.

Police officers

Police officers with special training will record an account of your experiences. This usually happens through a video interview in a safe place for children and young people. It is the police officers' job to protect young people from the person who has abused them.

Children and Young Person's Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (CYP-ISVAs)

In Leicester, there are advisors who can offer support to children and young people who have disclosed any type of sexual abuse, whether this happened recently or in the past. An advisor can support you in reporting to the police and will continue to support you up to any court hearing. If the case goes to court the CYP-ISVA will help you to prepare by discussing special measures with you, providing pre-trial support at home and support you in court while you give evidence.

Please contact your local CYP-ISVA for further information (see pull out sheets of useful agencies).

**Disclosure means
telling another person
that you have
been abused.**

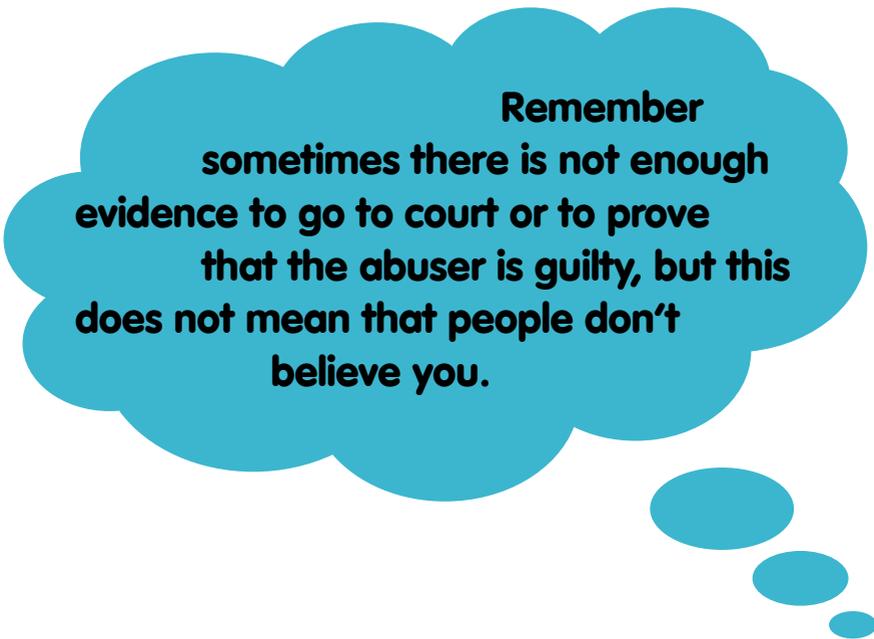
Medical examinations

Sometimes you may be asked to have a medical examination. This checks whether there has been any physical harm to your body and also gathers evidence to support the police investigation. Medical evidence can be extremely important if the case goes to court. However you have the right to refuse to have this examination .

Court

If enough evidence can be gathered, you may be asked to go to court. This can be a long time after you have spoken to the police.

If you are asked to speak at court, you will do this from a video link and will not have to see the abuser at any time during the court hearing.



**Remember
sometimes there is not enough
evidence to go to court or to prove
that the abuser is guilty, but this
does not mean that people don't
believe you.**

Young people's stories

The following stories are fictionalised accounts based on real stories of young people we have worked with. We hope that by reading these accounts, you will feel less alone and isolated.

Ayesha's story

Ayesha was 10 when her brother started touching her. To begin with, she felt very confused. She felt she had to obey him because he was her older brother. As time went on, the abuse got worse. She felt dirty and thought that she would be in trouble if anyone found out. It got harder and harder to say anything. She was terrified that if she told, her parents would be angry that she hadn't said anything sooner, or that it would destroy their family. Her brother made all sorts of threats, including hurting her if she told. She knew that her mum and dad relied upon her brother to look after her when they worked. As time went by, Ayesha found it harder to cope. She couldn't really concentrate at school or sleep at night. She felt really alone and scared and daren't talk to her friends about it. She was thinking about it all the time. Eventually she plucked up the courage to talk to her favourite teacher.

It has been hard for her, because her mum and dad were really shocked and upset and her brother has needed to move out for now. However, she feels relieved that the abuse has stopped and she is no longer carrying around this terrible secret. The family are getting some help to sort things out.

Kelly

Kelly is 16 years old. Her stepfather started abusing her when he moved into the family home four years ago. She felt that she couldn't talk to anyone about it and has felt very confused. In order to avoid him, she hangs around with her mates in the evening. She was recently caught shoplifting and school have contacted her mum about her bunking off lessons and smoking.

She has told quite a few lies to her mum about where she goes and what she does. Her stepfather tells her that everyone thinks she is a 'slag' and no one will ever believe her if she tells about the abuse. She is worried about how her mum would cope being a single parent again if she told and he left. She finds some comfort in eating masses of chocolate, but then hates herself and makes herself sick.

Kelly wants the abuse to stop. She wants to talk to her mum about what's been happening, but she is not sure how her mum will react. Her mum seems so happy with her stepfather, and Kelly is worried that her mum won't believe her or will think she did something to make the abuse happen. Kelly has told a friend at school about what's been going on and she has just found out that her friend has told their teacher.

Jack's story

Jack is now 12 years old. From the age of eight, a good family friend has been sexually abusing him. Andy started touching him when he was helping him to do his homework. Andy teaches computer studies. Jack's parents really trusted him.

Jack felt really bad about himself because when the abuse first started, he didn't really understand what was happening and actually quite liked

some of the feelings that the 'tickly game' gave him. He felt ashamed, and because he hadn't said anything straight away, he thought that people would blame him if he told. He also thought that no one would believe him because Andy was a teacher. He began to wonder if he was gay because of these experiences. He felt like he was going mad and found that he was getting into a lot of trouble at school. He lost his temper a lot with his friends and felt like no one really understood him.

Things came to a head when a boy at Andy's college said that he had been touched by Andy. At first, when Jack's parents asked him if he had ever been abused by Andy, he said that he hadn't, but later he told his mum and dad about what had been happening. They were upset but believed him. Now he wishes that he'd told earlier. He still blames himself and has lots of mixed up feelings, but was brave enough to talk to the police and go to court, where Andy was sent to prison. He now knows that sexual abuse happens to boys as well as girls.

Chantelle

Chantelle is 15 years old. She was raped by a boy in the year above her at school. He used to follow her home from school with his mates, taunting her with racist names about being mixed heritage. The attack happened one night when she was on the way home from the school disco. She now wonders if he had been planning it all evening.

It was some weeks before she told her mum about the attack, by which time the police said there wasn't enough evidence to investigate further.

Life at school has been dreadful for her. Although her form tutor is

very sympathetic, the boy who attacked her remains at school. She feels like the whole school knows and is talking about her. She confides in her older cousin. This helps, but they have started drinking a lot together.

At times when she is desperate, she cuts her arms. She feels it is a way of letting out the pain. She is worried about some of the things that she is doing, but doesn't know what else to do. She is just starting to share some of these worries with her counsellor.

Vijay

Vijay is 14 years old. He has always felt a bit different to other boys as he doesn't like football and often feels like he doesn't fit in anywhere. He spends a lot of time after school playing games or in chatrooms on his laptop. He finds it easier to make friends online.

He had been chatting to one lad in particular, called Paul, who he got on with and felt understood him and also said he feels like he doesn't fit in.

A few weeks ago, Paul asked Vijay to share sexual images of himself. Vijay didn't want to lose his friendship so he agreed. Last week he found out that Paul isn't the same age as him as he had thought, but is an older man. Paul has told Vijay that if he doesn't send more images of himself he will contact Vijay's family and send them the pictures. Vijay doesn't know what to do and feels trapped. He thinks his form tutor might have noticed that something is wrong as she has asked to meet with him tomorrow. He has decided he is going to tell her what is going on.

How sexual abuse may affect you

We know from working with many young people that it is very

These are just some of the feelings
that you may experience.

No confidence. Empty.
Scared of rejection. Embarrassed.
Scared to trust. Low self-esteem.
Blaming yourself for the abuse.
Lonely. Ashamed. Humiliated.
Despairing. Anxious. Confused.
Angry. Numb. Dirty. Disgusted.
Burdened. Sad. Scared.
Isolated. Hurt. Guilty.

Sexual abuse is a traumatic experience.
Everybody responds differently to trauma
and everyone's experience is equally valid.

Reactions to sexual abuse

It is not surprising given all of these feelings, that young people's behaviours are also then affected.

These feelings may cause you to behave in the following ways.

Getting into trouble at school.

Not being able to concentrate. Not eating.

Taking anger out on others. Comfort eating.

Using alcohol to take the pain away. Hurting myself.

Nightmares and flashbacks. Trouble sleeping.

Allowing others to use me sexually. Dissociation.

Being alone and having no friends.

Finding it hard to get on with people close to me.

Washing all the time. Neglecting my personal hygiene.

Scared to go out/have relationships.

**It can take some time to recover
and you will have good and bad days
along the way.**

Coping strategies

It is useful to have some ideas of things you can do to help you feel better when you are struggling. Here are some simple activities that can calm you down, distract you and help you to feel better:

Breathe in slowly through your nose and out through your mouth; this increases oxygen to your brain and helps you to focus on your breathing rather than your worries. It may help to imagine you are smelling cookies being baked.

Relax your muscles either by lying down and focusing on each part of your body or by taking a bath or shower.

Exercise is an excellent distraction and releases endorphins also known as 'happy hormones'.

Listen to music you enjoy, focus and listen to the sounds.

Grounding is useful to help distract you from an unwanted memory or flashback. It reminds your body that you are in the here and now and not in the past. You can ground yourself by paying attention to your surroundings and noticing what you can see, hear and smell. Or you can say facts about yourself out loud, for example, your name, address telephone number and date of birth.

Colouring is very much in vogue at the moment; focusing on the task of colouring has therapeutic qualities that can help calm and distract you.

Replace negative thoughts with positive ones using ideas on the next page.

Positive messages to help you cope

We encourage young people to replace some of the negative feelings and messages that they may have about themselves with positives.

Here are some messages that you can say to yourself.

- I am not responsible for the abuse.
- The abuse was not my fault.
- I can take care of my own body and decide who I will have relationships with.
- There is nothing I did to cause the abuse.
- I am not the 'only one' – others have experienced sexual abuse too.
- I have people in my life who can support me.
- I can recover from the abuse.
- The abuser is the only person who is responsible for the abuse.
- It is 'normal' to be experiencing lots of feelings about what has happened.
- I can get through this and look after myself.
- I still have a future, which I can control.
- Sexual abuse is something that has happened to me that shouldn't have happened but it is not who I am.
- I'm not going to let the abuser win by ruining my life.
- I will remember that there are good things in my life and good things that have happened to me.
- I have people in my life who can support me.

Your personal rights

Sometimes when young people have been sexually abused they can be confused about what is okay and not okay in relationships. They might not know what their personal rights are or what kind of behaviour to expect from adults. Often, children are told to respect their elders and be nice, which can be confusing when an adult behaves in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable. They may then go along with things because they feel they should.

It is okay to say no when something doesn't feel right or someone makes you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to do anything you do not want to do.

What does consent mean?

Consent is when you and another person both say yes to having sex or doing sexual things.

Not saying 'no' doesn't mean you said 'yes.'

If someone makes you feel uncomfortable, talk to a trusted friend or adult.

It is okay to say no.
You don't have to do anything you don't want to do.

At the back of this booklet you will find pull out sheets with useful contact numbers for further advice.

Know your personal rights and boundaries

- Your body is yours.
- Past sexual activity with someone does not mean you are obliged to do it again.
- You do not have to do anything you do not want to do.
- Trust your instincts.
- It is not okay for adults to engage in sexual behavior with you.
- It is not okay for adults to take pictures or videos of you in sexual positions or unclothed.
- Regardless of how you dress or talk, it does not mean you are saying yes to sexual activity.
- Pornography is not an accurate depiction of real life.
- You deserve to be spoken to with respect and never feel forced or manipulated.
- Alcohol and drugs may make it hard for you to maintain your boundaries and can cloud your judgment.
- Touching someone sexually while they are drunk is abuse.
- Adults should not discuss their sexual fantasies or share pornography with you.
- No one has the right to touch you without your permission.
- You are important and deserve to be treated well and respected.

Common worries young people may have

Q. Was it my fault? Did I do something to make it happen?

A. No. Abusers abuse because THEY have decided to.

Q. Should I have been able to stop it?

A. No. Unfortunately, we know that abusers are very manipulative and trick and trap children and young people.

Q. Why didn't my family believe me straightaway?

A. Sometimes those closest to you can find it difficult to believe, perhaps because of shock or worry about what may happen. They may also be close to the abuser and not want to believe that this has happened. This is not your responsibility and often people's responses can change over time.

Q. What if some of what happened felt nice?

A. Our bodies are made to respond to touch, so sometimes touching can feel nice even if it is not wanted.

Q. Is there something wrong with me if I miss them?

A. No. It can be very confusing when you have been close to the person who has abused you and shared good times with them. It is possible to love the abuser, but hate what they have done; however this does not mean that it is safe to see them.

Q. Is it okay that I don't want to talk to those closest to me as they might get upset?

A. It is normal for those who care about you to get upset if you are upset and it is not your responsibility to help or comfort them. It can sometimes be easier to talk to someone outside of your family.

Support for you

Many young people manage to cope with the impacts of their experiences of sexual abuse without any additional support (figures from the NSPCC suggest this is around 40% of young people).

Some young people will have members of their family who can offer good support. However, it can be very difficult to talk to close family and friends about what has happened, and sometimes, they don't know what to say or are not as supportive as they could be.

If you are struggling to cope with what has happened, it can be really helpful to talk to someone outside of your family. This can be a chance to express your feelings, discuss your worries and gain coping strategies in a safe, supportive and confidential place.

Family Action's Post Sexual Abuse (PSA) service

Family Action's PSA service has supported many children and young people who have been sexually abused. We usually meet with young people on a one-to-one basis, either at our office, at school or an alternative venue. We also run groups every now and again. Most young people tell us that they have found it helpful to talk to someone following abuse to share how they are feeling and learn ways to cope. If you would like support from us, you will find our contact details on inside cover of this guide or visit our webpage: <https://www.family-action.org.uk/what-we-do/children-families/psa/>.

We hope that the pull out sheet at the back of this booklet will be a useful list of places where you can find further support or information.

Glossary

CCG	Clinical Commissioning Group
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CSA	Child sexual abuse
CSE	Child sexual exploitation
Disclosure	When a child tells another person that he or she has been sexually abused
PSA	Post Sexual Abuse service
CYP-ISVA	Children and Young Person's Independent Sexual Violence Advisor

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