

YOUNG PERSON'S INFORMATION BOOKLET

Age 12 and upwards



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

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**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.**

Family Action is a charity committed to building stronger families by delivering innovative and effective services and support. We seek to empower people and communities to address their issues and challenges through practical, financial and emotional help.

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.

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 another 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
- Peer abuse by someone of a similar age to you
- Online abuse
- Grooming
- Rape
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) — 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.

Ethnicity and diversity

We know that, unfortunately, child sexual abuse happens in every part of society, every culture and religion from the rich to the poor. Family Action's PSA service aims to work in a culturally sensitive manner, recognising that there may be barriers to disclosing and accessing services for children and young people relating to their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, we ensure that when working with all children we acknowledge the child's culture, identity and background.

Young people with Special Educational Needs or who have Looked After Status with children's social care.

Young people who live with disabilities, specialist educational needs or who are looked after by social care 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.

The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse estimates that 500,000 children are sexually abused each year, though many don't tell anyone.

What is online abuse?

Online child sexual abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the internet through social networks, online games, webcams 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 viewing or 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.

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

Why is it so hard to talk about?



We know that it can be very difficult for children and young people to tell someone that they have been sexually abused. Even after you've told someone, you might find it hard to talk about the abuse for reasons such as:

- Not expecting to be believed
- Not recognising it as abuse
- Self-blame and guilt
- Shock or numbness
- 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, or fear of stigma
- Not knowing who to talk to

“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, it is important to remember 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 know that their behaviour is unacceptable and 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. Some abusers may have been planning the abuse beforehand.

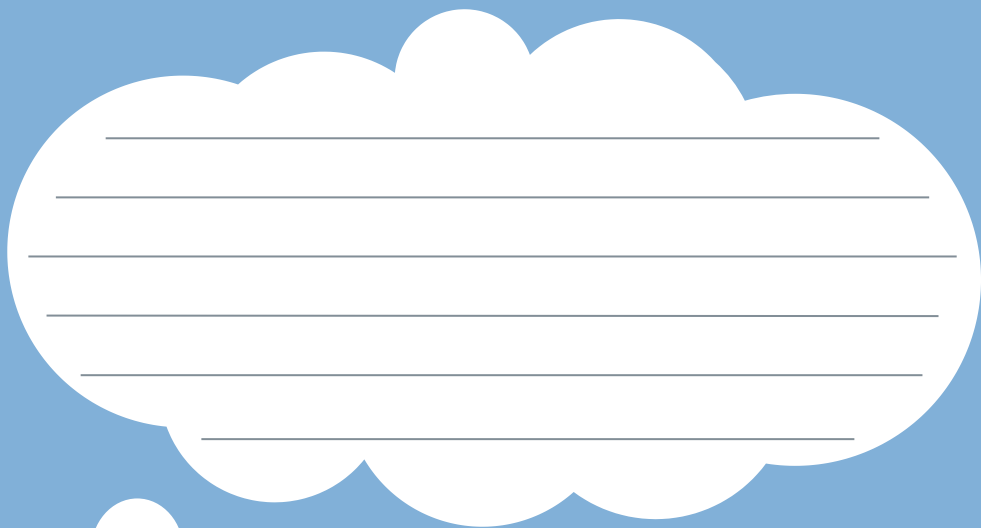
- People who abuse will often isolate the person that they are abusing from others. They may convince people that the victim is untrustworthy or a liar, making it hard for them to confide in anyone.
- Sexual abuse can occur over a long time. In the early stages a person who is being abused may not really 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.

People who sexually abuse know that their behaviour is unacceptable and will manipulate others to keep it a secret.

Telling someone about the abuse you have endured can be difficult and frightening.

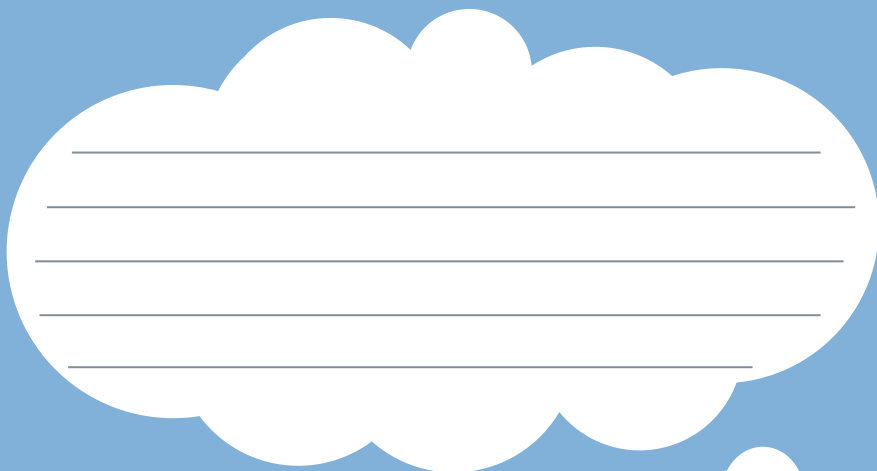
But, remember that you deserve proper help and support, and that you are valued.

How did you feel about telling someone what happened?



A large white thought bubble with a scalloped edge, containing five horizontal lines for writing. To its left are two smaller white circles of varying sizes, connected by a thin line, suggesting a thought process.

Is it even hard to write about it here? Why might that be?



A large white thought bubble with a scalloped edge, containing five horizontal lines for writing. To its right and bottom are two smaller white circles of varying sizes, connected by a thin line, suggesting a thought process.

What happens after I tell someone?

A **disclosure** is when you share new information with someone else about the abuse.


Disclosure can be difficult and scary, especially the first time you tell someone. It might take weeks, months, or years for you to tell the full story of what has happened, or you may never tell the whole story.

If you have been abused then a crime has been committed, and it is the job of the police to investigate. Other people may get involved, such as a social worker or a CH-ISVA (Children's Independent Sexual Violence Advisor). All of these people have different roles and are there to help you.

Once the police have finished their investigation, they will send all the information they have to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), who then decide if there is enough evidence to go to court.

If you need more information about the court process, we are happy to talk about this with you.

Disclosure can be difficult and scary, especially the first time you tell someone.



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.**

How sexual abuse may affect you

We know from working with many young people that it is very common to have lots of difficult and confused feelings. Below are some things that young people have described feeling after abuse - maybe you can relate to some of them.

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



Sexual abuse is a
traumatic experience.

**Everybody responds
differently to trauma
and everyone's
experience is equally
valid.**

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

Reactions to sexual abuse

It is not surprising given all of these feelings, that your behaviour may also be affected. You might find yourself lashing out or behaving in ways you feel like you can't control.

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

- **Finding it hard to get on with those close to you**
- **Not being able to concentrate**
- **Getting into trouble at school**
- **Taking anger out on others**
- **Comfort eating or not eating enough**
- **Using alcohol to take the pain away**
- **Having nightmares and flashbacks**
- **Allowing others to use me sexually**
- **Being alone and having no friends**
- **Not looking after myself**
- **Scared to go out/have relationships**

Helping yourself to cope

If you are feeling anxious or panicked:

- **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. Try to focus on your breaths and how your body feels.

- **If you're having a panic attack, recognise what is happening.**

Remind yourself that you are not in danger, that you won't feel this way forever, and that this feeling will pass.

- **Find some where to make yourself feel safer.**

If you're in public, this might be somewhere private and quiet. If you're at home, get somewhere comfortable (such as on the sofa) or move into a room with other people so that you're not by yourself.



If you are struggling to sleep keep a **journal** or notebook by your bed to write down any thoughts or worries that are keeping you awake.

You may also chose to have **something comforting** in bed with you, like a hot water bottle, a soft blanket, or a parents' T-shirt. Try to focus on how it feels or smells.

If you are finding it hard to get motivated and get things done:

- **Break tasks down** and do small things to start with. If it seems to overwhelming to tidy your whole room, start by just clearing one surface. Be kind to yourself about the things you are able to do.
- Make a numbered **list of things you enjoy doing** (hobbies, activities, people you like to talk to). Then roll a dice or use a random number generator app, and do whichever activity the number turns up.

Helping yourself to cope (continued...)

If you are having difficult thoughts and feelings:

Try the “[Chuck It Bucket](#)” technique. Think about what aspects of your thoughts and worries are consuming your time and “let go” of them. You can do this by physically writing things down and throwing them away, or writing your thoughts in your phone and then deleting them.

[Accept your feelings](#). There is no shame in having a painful or difficult feeling. Breathe in very deeply and make lots of room in your body for that feeling. Then start telling yourself “yes – that’s normal. Yes – there is no shame here. It can be hard not to feel this”. Allow yourself to cry if you need to.

If you often struggle with thoughts of hurting yourself:

Make a “[coping box](#)” filled with things that can help you to cope in the short term. This can include anything at all—for example; comforting items, positive messages, contact numbers for crisis helplines, and a safety plan to remind you what to do to stay safe while the thoughts pass.

Let someone else help you to cope:

- Set up a [WhatsApp chat](#) with a safe adult (like a parent) and title it “feelings chat” – and tell them how you are feeling when you need to, in that space. They can reply that way.
- With your safe adult, [draw a picture](#) of you and they can write all about you and you can share your positive memories.
- Your safe adult could make some little [message cards](#) and leave them somewhere special for you when you need them. A little picture that says “I believe in you” or “even when we are apart I still think about you” could be a lovely way to help you cope with hard days.
- Make your adult aware of your safety plan and what they can do to help when you’re having a difficult time.


Try to accept your feelings. There is no shame in having a painful or difficult feeling.

Positive messages to help you cope

We know that it can be difficult to break free of negative thoughts, but you deserve to feel good about yourself. Think about what you would say to a friend in the same situation as you.

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.



We know that it can be difficult to break free of negative thoughts, but you deserve to feel good about yourself.

- 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.

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.

**I will remember that there
are good things in my life
and good things that have
happened to me.**

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/psa>

GLOSSARY

CEOP	Child Exploitation and Online Protection www.ceop.police.uk
Child	The term child is used within this booklet to refer to children and young people under the age of 18 years old.
CH-ISVA	Children's Independent Sexual Violence Advisor
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CSA	Child Sexual Abuse
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
Disclosure	When a child shares new information that they have been sexually abused
NSPCC	National Society for the Protection of Children Against Cruelty www.nspcc.org.uk
PSA	Post Sexual Abuse Service



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Patron: HRH The Princess of Wales.

Chair: Ian Hargrave. Chief Executive: David Holmes CBE.