

Are you concerned
about your child's
sexual behaviour?



Is there concern about your child's sexual behaviour?

This booklet is for families whose child has been involved in sexual behaviour that has been harmful to others.

Families often find it hard to cope when someone says their child has sexually abused someone, especially if the victim is closely related to them.

Families can often feel:

- devastated
- shamed
- shocked
- angry
- lonely
- tearful
- they have divided loyalties
- they can't believe their child did it

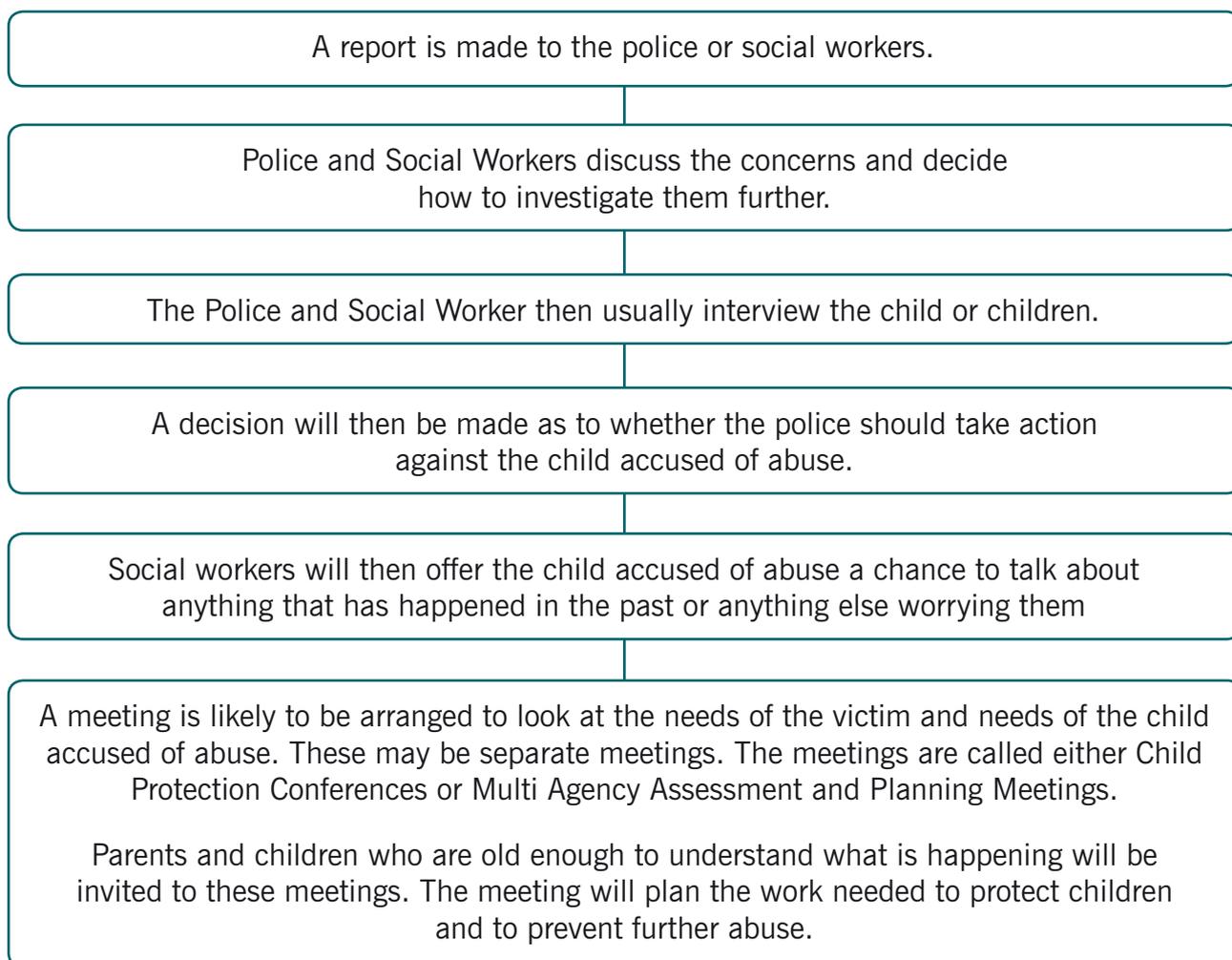
By reading this leaflet it is hoped you will begin to feel that there are ways of getting through the difficulties you are facing at the moment.



What will happen?

- Police and Social Workers have a set way of dealing with allegations of sexual abuse by children.
- They believe the allegations should be taken seriously. Everyone will need to work closely together to find out what happened.
- It is important that a police investigation is completed and the victim supported. However, it is equally important to support and help the child who has been accused of abuse and their family to prevent further harm in the future.

This is what is likely to happen after concerns are raised:



- A Social worker will explain to the parents and the person involved what is happening at each stage of the investigation.
- It is known that the more the parents support their child and do the work asked of them the better the chances are of the young person doing well and not abusing again.

Is your child's sexual behaviour concerning?

It may be helpful to think of your child's sexual behaviour as being on a scale. At one end of the scale are the kinds of sexual behaviours most children of their age become involved in, e.g. doctors & nurses, curiosity about each other's bodies.

At the other end of the scale are sexual behaviours, which are obviously wrong and harmful to others, e.g. rape, oral sex.

In the middle is the 'grey area' where you and professionals may be less sure. In these situations, the question of whether the behaviour is abusive or not, will depend on certain other things.

Deciding what sexual behaviour is normal and what is abusive may be difficult and can leave you feeling confused.

When thinking about whether behaviour is abusive or not here are some things to consider:

- The age difference between the children.
- Any difference in power, for example is one child cleverer, stronger or more confident.
- What actually happened.
- Whether both of the people involved agreed as to what would happen and were able to understand what they had agreed to.
- Whether bribes, threats or violence were used.
- Whether they tried to keep it secret.
- What the victim thought and felt about what happened.
- Is the child more vulnerable, disabled, cognitively impaired?



Child Sexual Development

It is important to remember that all children develop at different rates. Their sexual knowledge and sexual development also varies. For children who have been involved in sexually abusive behaviour their sexual development will differ to that of other children their age.

Children up to 5yrs

Children begin to explore their bodies and begin to look at the private parts of others. They start to ask questions e.g. where do babies come from? At this age they have little understanding of adult sex.

Children 6-10yrs

They are now becoming more aware of sexual activity via the playground and TV. They may begin to masturbate in private. At this stage they will ask more direct questions regarding sexual matters.

The following are signs of a child up to 10yrs who may have been involved in sexually abusive behaviour.

- If sexual behaviour happens between children where there is an age or ability difference.
- If a child has 'adult like' knowledge of sexual behaviour.
- A child who appears obsessed about sexual matters.
- A child who behaves sexually towards adults.

Young People 10-14yrs

These young people are entering puberty and their bodies are usually changing. They are becoming attracted to their peers and masturbation is likely to increase.

Young people 14-18yrs

Around this age young people are beginning to become involved in consensual sexual activities. They talk of sex, make sexual jokes and may look at pornographic material.

The following are signs of a young person 10-18yrs who maybe involved in sexually abusive behaviour.

- If a young person 'flashes' or tries to expose others.
- The use of porn that involves children.
- Sexual contact with younger or more vulnerable children.
- Sexual contact without others permission.
- Forced sexual contact.
- Obscene phone calls.

Sexual behaviours that are always of concern for any age child or young person.

- If violence or aggression is used.
- If a child inserts an object into another child.
- If a child or young person tries or does anything sexual with an animal.
- If there are threats of harm or of keeping the activity secret.

A sexual behaviour maybe acceptable in one situation but unacceptable and harmful in another.

Examples:

Paul

- 14 years old
- Masturbates in his bedroom

ACCEPTABLE

Because it is normal teenage behaviour in the privacy of his own bedroom

Lee

- 14 years old
- Masturbates in a children's park

UNACCEPTABLE

Because it is in public and abusive to children and adults who may witness this.

Emma

- 15 years old
- Babysitting for Lucy, 5 years old
- Emma asks Lucy to touch her private parts and she in turn touches Lucy's
- Lucy says "No"
- Emma threatens to tell Lucy's parents that Lucy has been naughty if she doesn't do it

UNACCEPTABLE

Because Emma is older than Lucy and is in a position of trust as her babysitter. Emma uses a threat to carry out the abuse; also, Lucy is not of an age to agree (consent) to the behaviour.

Questions and Answers

Does this mean that my child has been abused?

Most people think that if a child or young person sexually abuses then they are repeating their own experiences of being sexually abused. This is not always true.

A child under 10 years old who has sexually abused is more likely to have been sexually abused themselves. However studies with teenage boys who have sexually abused show they are more likely to have suffered some type of abuse or trauma but not necessarily sexual abuse.

There is not much research about teenage girls who abuse but what there is suggests that they are more likely to have been sexually abused than teenage boys.

Will my child always be a risk?

Some young people are less likely to abuse again than others but for some they will continue to abuse.

A lot depends on how much support and help the young person is offered and is willing to take. This includes help from family members as well as social workers and other professionals.

Can anything be done for my child?

Yes. If support and help is offered and accepted as soon as possible the young person is less likely to become “hooked” on the feelings that they get from the abuse. An important factor is the other positive things happening in the young person’s life such as the support you can offer as parents.

What can I do as a parent?

- Provide help and support to deal with all situations in their life.
- Provide an environment, which is safe and away from temptation, e.g. do not leave your child alone when other children are around.
- Support the work being carried out by professionals.
- Be consistent at home – reinforce the work that the professionals do.



What do I tell other people?

Other children in the family:

Saying nothing may seem like the easiest thing to do. In fact it really isn't the best way forward. There are no clear-cut answers – what you say and to whom will depend on many things, like; how old the children are and the nature of the abuse that has taken place. It will also depend on whether the young person who has abused has remained at home.

The following can help you to decide what to say:

- You should think about what might happen if you don't tell the children. They might hear rumours or comments at school or in the local community.
- Your children might need to know what is OK and what isn't regarding sexual behaviour so they know what to do if somebody tries to be abusive towards them.
- As a rule it is normally best to tell brothers and sisters about issues that directly affect them.

Other people in the community:

Most people do not understand about children and young people who have sexually abused others. This can mean that young people and their families can be faced with negative feelings and responses from the communities that they live in.

Many people are afraid that their children are at risk. This is fuelled by negative newspaper reports about "paedophiles" and "perverts".

The following may help you deal with other people's questions.

If anyone asks you directly you may wish to say that

- There is a problem
- You are working to resolve it
- Make it clear that you do not wish to discuss the details
- Do not feel "pressured" or put on the "spot".

If you do wish to tell someone

- Plan what you are going to say
- Think about the possible consequences
- Don't feel guilty about keeping things to yourself. Few families share their problems with people in the street.

If you do tell a close friend

- Make sure you can trust them
- Let them know that the information is not to be told to anyone else
- If in doubt talk to a social worker or other professionals.



Will my child be on a list?

Child Protection Plan

The Children and Young People's Service will have a Child Protection Plan for those children who need protection due to some kind of risk or danger.

A young person displaying sexually abusive behaviour may be the subject of a plan if it is thought that they are at risk themselves.

The brothers and sisters of a young person displaying sexually abusive behaviour may also be the subject of a plan if they are felt to be at risk.

Sex Offender Register

This is a list held by the police of adults and some young people who have committed sexual offences. If your child's name is put on the register you will be given details of what this means by the police.

Schedule One Offender

This is a term you may have heard. It applies to anyone who is convicted of an offence against a person under 18. If a person has a Schedule One conviction the police, Social Services, the Youth Offending service and Probation will look at what risk the person might pose to other people in their home or community.

What support is there for me as a parent?

There may well be a number of professionals involved with the family. These include the Police, Social Workers, Youth Offending Team Officers or a Psychologist.

Ask as many questions as you need to. They are there to support you as well as your child.