



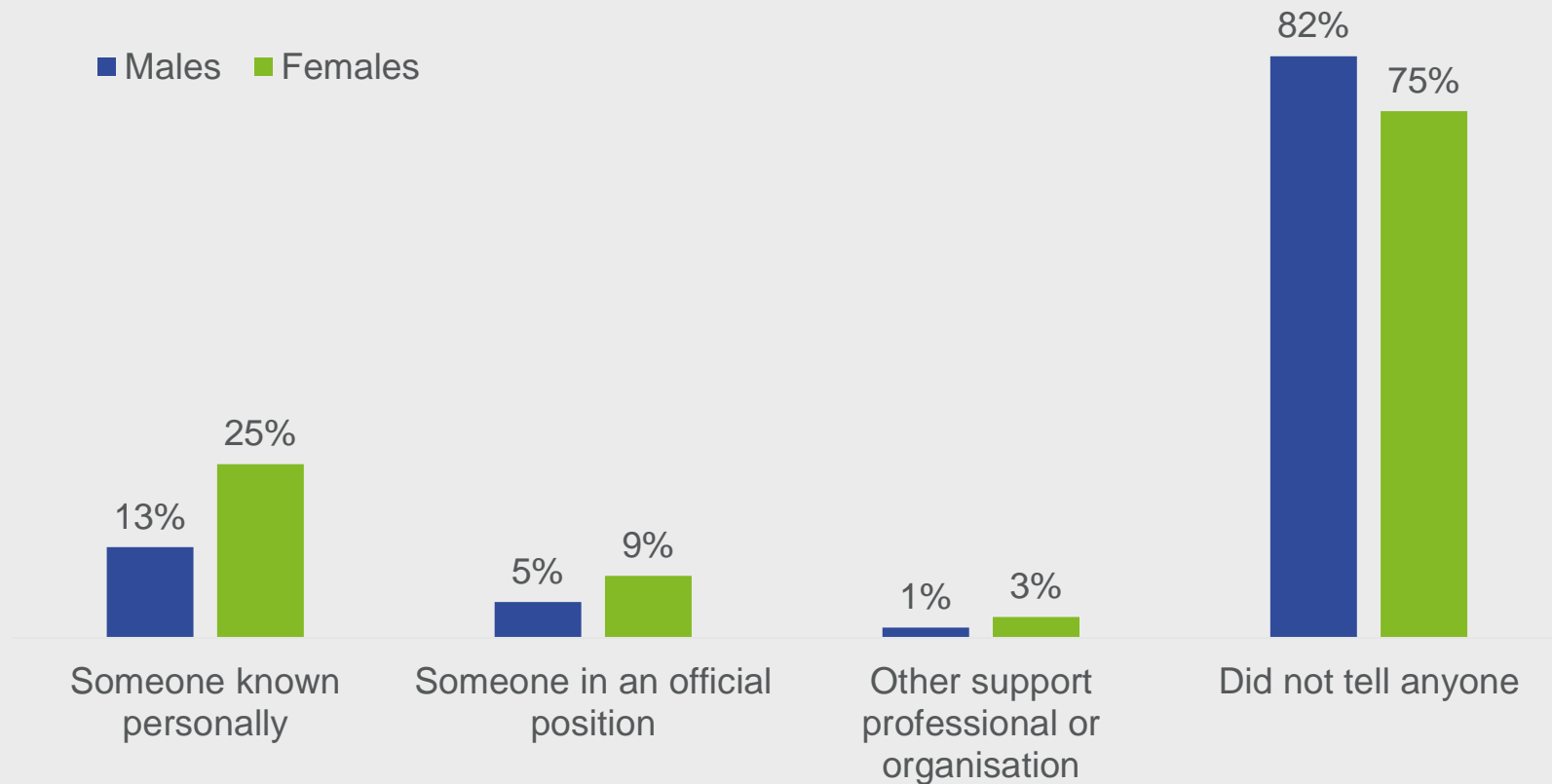
Workshop: **The signs and indicators of child sexual abuse**

19 June 2024

Who was told at the time

Rape or penetrative abuse

■ Males ■ Females



“Professionals rely too heavily on children to verbally disclose”

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

The impact of child sexual abuse

The traumatic impact

Betrayal

Traumatic
sexualisation

Confusion

Stigmatisation

Powerlessness

Secrecy



How does the impact present in children?

Fear

- They may be scared of the person who has harmed them and be reluctant to see them
- Fear of others
- Lonely and isolated - wary that people will find out about the abuse and reject them

Anxiety

- May feel anxious about the abuse and been threatened by the abuser
- Can manifest as worries about going to school, friendships, being alone, difficulties sleeping

Low mood

- May become quiet and withdraw from friendships, appear sad or reluctant to talk
- Non-organic symptoms (e.g. tummy pain or headaches)
- Immune system may be affected

How does the impact present in children?

Difficulty regulating emotions

- Struggle to regulate
- Appearing more irritable, hostile, impatient or angry towards peers or adults

Confusion with roles

- May oscillate between appearing 'grown up' and wanting to look after others...and...
- Appearing more 'child like' in their inability to complete tasks

Sexual pre-occupation/discomfort or confusion about their body

- May display sexualised behaviour outside of their developmental stage, or unexpected sexual knowledge
- May be preoccupied with sexuality, engage in repetitive sexual behaviour, masturbating or being fascinated with body parts
- Puberty particularly challenging time

How does the impact present in children?

Grief

- If abuse by someone the child loves or likes, they may experience a grief reaction in relation to loss of trust
- Can also include anticipatory grief

Disrupted relationships with others

- May be less trusting of others
- Or, they may not want to separate from others and may appear dependent on adults around them

Becoming abusive to others

- May wish to have control over others in response to feeling a loss of control in their own lives
- May manifest as bullying

Signs and indicators

Building a picture of concerns





**Centre of
expertise**
on child
sexual abuse

Behaviour of the child/young person

Sexual abuse is a hidden crime and many of those who experience it do not report their experience for a number of years. Professionals must remember that all behaviour is communication

Physical signs

There may be physical signs in a child which may indicate sexual abuse

Signs & indicators of potential concern

Behaviour of those around the child

When building a picture of concerns it is important to note the signs and indicators of abusive behaviour (including grooming behaviour) in **the people around the child**

Environmental signs

It is useful to understand the family or environmental context within which the child is living, as some factors increased vulnerability to sexual harm

Avoid assumptions

Especially those based upon:



Gender



Ethnicity



Religion



Disability



Sexuality

Missing the signs

“What I needed at that particular time was somebody who was sensitive enough to see that this was a vulnerable person here. The issue was actually not about the anger and the aggression, or the violence, it’s about somebody who was actually crying out for help.”

(Male focus group participant, People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities)



The aim of our resource

The template aims to create a **common language** among professionals to discuss, record and share concerns that a child is being, or has been sexually abused.

It aims to help you:

- Consider, identify and clearly record signs which indicate that sexual abuse is or has been taking place
- Discuss and explore concerns that a child is being or has been sexually abused, and communicate these concerns to other organisations and agencies

Do note, it is not a diagnostic tool, nor is it intended for use as a “risk assessment” or a “box-ticking exercise”

How the template was developed

The idea:

- Situational crime prevention
- Preventative approaches

Scoping the evidence base:

- Reviewing the signs and indicators identified by key organisations
- Research base is limited (rarely a direct connection; methodological and ethical challenges)
 - Landmark research studies in the field
 - Recent overviews of research
 - Survivor testimony
 - Clinical and professional practice with abused children and adults over 4 decades
- Limitations regarding boys, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and disabled children

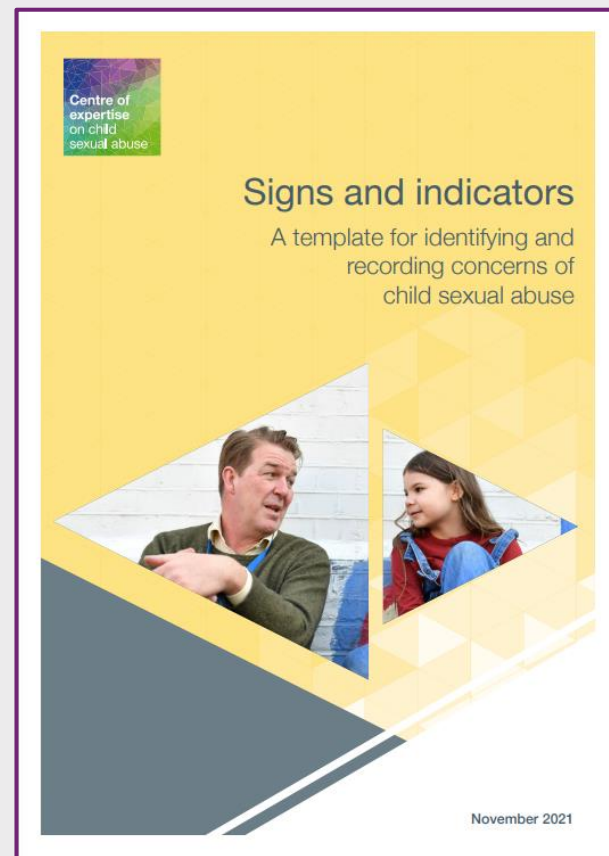
Thoroughly reviewed

Experts in UK organisations who work in the field of child sexual abuse.

Experts by experience:

- a focus group with adults with lived experience of sexual abuse
- a focus group with young people with learning disabilities who deliver training to other young people on sexual exploitation

Frontline professionals working across health, education, social care and criminal justice.



How to use the template in practice

How to use the template

To **inform**, rather than determine, professional decision-making. It is a structured professional judgement tool

Acts as a **prompt** to help decide when to talk to children, their parents/carers or other agencies – and what to talk to them about.

Use **dynamically**, following on from an initial gathering of information

Take a **multi-agency** approach.

Explanatory notes set out why specific signs/indicators have been included and how they relate to different groups of children.

Space to make **notes** including the context of the observation.

Consider what needs to **happen next**.

The layout of the template

The child's details

Details of the person completing the form

Behaviours in children which can indicate sexual abuse

Physical signs in a child which may indicate sexual abuse

Behaviour in those around the child

Environmental signs

What to do next

Explanatory notes

How the template was developed

Sources of information cited

Try it in action

- **Think of a child** you have worked with in the past, or currently work with, about whom you have had concerns of sexual abuse (if your role doesn't bring you into contact with children, refer to the case study.)
- **Think about what you know of the child**, the person/people who may be abusing the child, and their environment.
- **Complete pages 7 – 16** of the Signs and Indicators Template



Feedback

- Any questions in relation to the signs and indicators?
- What do you think of the template?
- How could your agency use the template in practice?



Understanding and responding well to signs and indicators that a child is being sexually abused is a **multi-agency responsibility**

Children's Social Care

To inform discussion
at a strategy meeting

As a contribution to
analysis of need and
risk when
undertaking S17/S47
assessments

To identify risk factors
and vulnerabilities to
address in
interventions with
families

For use in
supervision for case
discussion

In preparation for a
child protection
conference, child in
need meeting or child
looked after review

As a
recommendation by
Conference
Chairs/IROs

To gather evidence to
identify if further
action can be taken

Within a bundle of
evidence for Court

To support learning
about signs and
indicators of sexual
abuse

Youth Justice:
To use alongside the
completion and
review of AssetPlus
assessments

Record initial and on-going concerns about a child

Guide discussion with other key adults in education safeguarding meetings

Inform an initial discussion with a duty team colleague where there are concerns

Inform a referral to Children's Social Care

Support the Designated Safeguarding Lead's contribution to further investigations/strategy mtgs

To educate staff as part of a training/inset day/professional development

Health

Named and designated health professionals in acute and community settings

Aide memoire in paediatric assessments

To consider non-verbal signs in a child which aren't clinical but could be an indicator

To build a picture of concerns when a child presents with a sign or symptom (e.g. school nurse, GP, health visitors)

To help formulate a referral to Children's Social Care when child sexual abuse is a concern

In CAMHS discussions where knowledge of child and family may be pulled together to inform decision-making

In multi-disciplinary case discussion

To support learning about signs and indicators of sexual abuse within staff training sessions

Policing

As part of the evidence-gathering process within an investigation

To prompt further lines of enquiry for other officers who may take on the full investigation

To inform interview planning

To improve identification of sexual abuse during visits believed to be unrelated to sexual abuse

As a contribution to assessment/referral forwarded to Children's Social Care

In preparation for a child protection conference or child in need meeting

For use in supervision reviews for case/investigation discussion

As part of the evidence disclosure for CPS - providing a broader context around the allegation/concern

To support learning about signs and indicators of sexual abuse within staff training sessions

What actions can you take?

Consider whether:

Your organisation / agency holds further information which could be added

The picture indicates that further exploration with the child or their parents / carers is needed

The picture indicates a level of concern that warrants a prompt safeguarding referral

The picture indicates a level of concerns that should be shared with other key professionals in your agency

Further monitoring of the situation is needed.

Recording

- Professional judgement
- Substantiated either by fact, or backed up with evidence from what has been seen or heard
- Opinion is recorded as such
- Reasoning, analysis, conclusion



I am concerned that X and Y may be being sexually abused. This is because of the following:

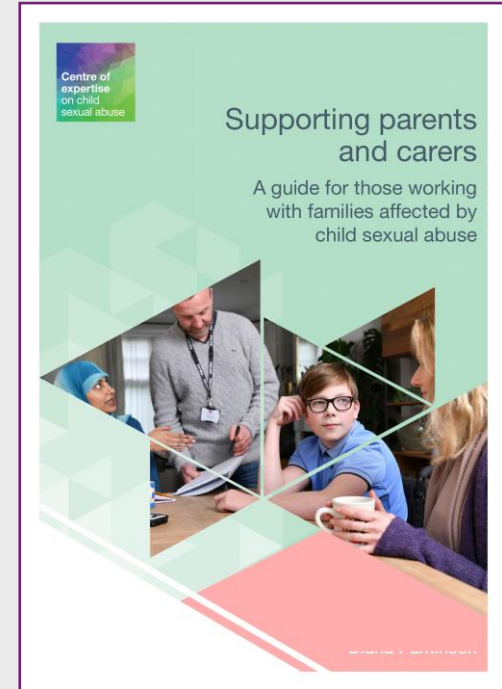
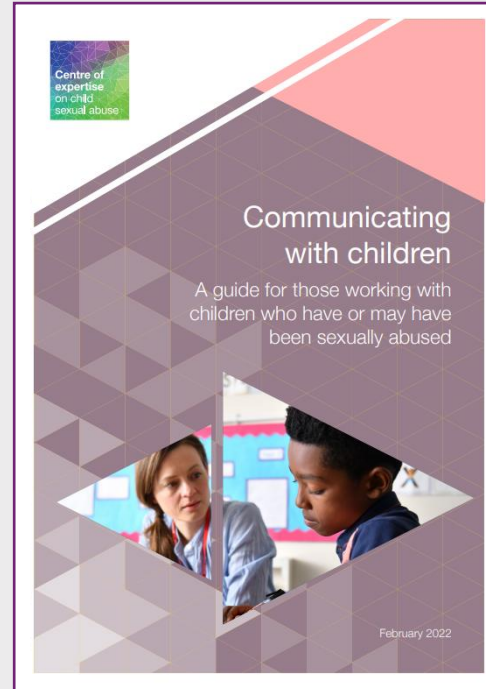
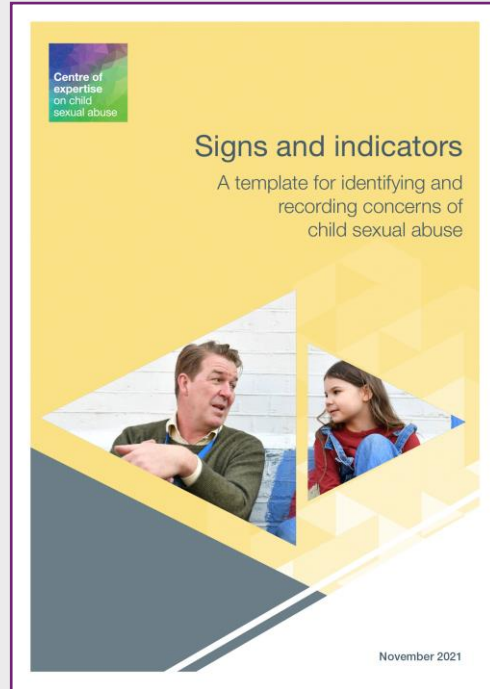
- List potential indicators (in child, people around the child, environmental factors)

These may be signs of other factors in X and Y's life, however in order to explore this hypothesis, I will:

- List actions that you have identified e.g. speak with other agencies, speak with X and Y.

Together, we can do this.

Resources for practice



All resources are free to download on our site. With 12 short videos covering key themes:
<http://www.csacentre.org.uk/knowledge-in-practice/practice-improvement/>

Any questions?

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Tell us what you think

Remember to complete our post event survey to tell us what you thought about the CSA Centre Roadshow



Thank you!

For more information please contact:
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**Centre of expertise
on child sexual abuse**

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