



Centre of
expertise
on child
sexual abuse

Workshop: **Supporting parents and carers**

What I'm going to talk about today



Looking after yourself

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

Why parents need support

Why effective non-abusing parent/carer work is important



- The importance for the child of being believed by the main carer
- In their role in protecting their children
- In their role in managing risk
- In their role in supporting their child/ren
- Can aid assessment of the person of concern

The better we support the parent, the better we support the child

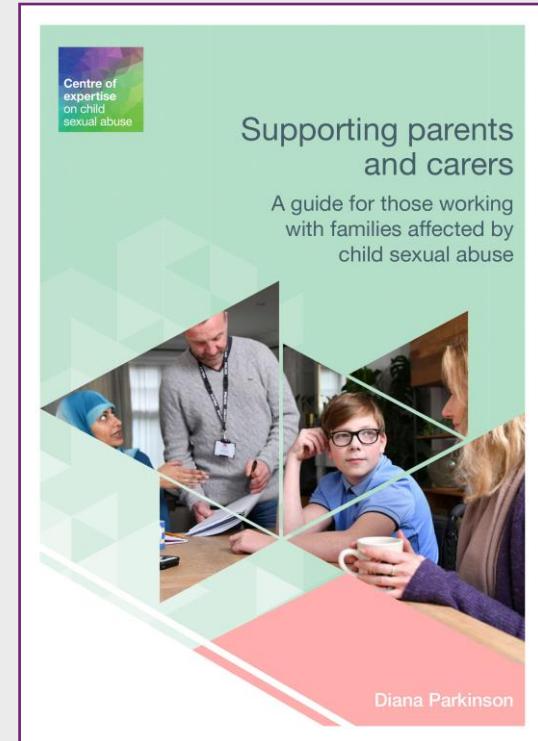
Supporting parents and carers

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

Understandably, when we think about sexual abuse, we think about the impact of the abuse on the child.

However, it is important to remember that the sexual abuse of a child affects **the whole family** and there are likely to be feelings of shock, anger, confusion and disbelief more broadly.

This guide explores the impact of child sexual abuse carried out in different contexts, and how such abuse can affect families differently.



How situations may present

Their child has disclosed sexual abuse within the home by a family member

Their child has disclosed abuse outside of the home by an outsider

Their partner has been accused of abuse either within or outside of the family

Their partner has been arrested for indecent image offences

You receive a phone call and you're told...

That your partner has sexually abused a child

That this child is your own child

- What are your thoughts?
- Feelings?
- Emotions?
- Anxieties?
- What are the implications of this information for you?
- Who will you tell?

Understanding parents' reactions

Initial feelings

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Why might parents try to deny that the abuse has happened?

Denial may also occur because of parents' **fear, confusion or misguided beliefs.**

- They may believe that they can deal with the situation **on their own**
- They may be afraid they may be **judged** as complicit, or **blamed** for not protecting their child.
- They may feel that they **won't be able to manage** on their own
- They may be afraid that the person suspected of the abuse **will be violent or abusive**

Issues relating to faith and culture

- I made a vow before God that we will stay together until death, come what may.
- If I believe it I shall want to leave him and that will make me a bad Christian/Muslim/Hindu/any other faith.
- If it is true then I and my children could be ostracised from our local faith group and community and we have nowhere else to go. That would damage all my children.
- I was taught to believe in forgiveness. If I cannot forgive then my faith is wrong.
- He is the head of the house and I have been taught to obey.
- If I believe the allegation and act on it and it becomes public knowledge, it will damage my child's marriage prospects.
- The authorities consist mostly of western white people and they won't understand.
- We do not talk about things outside our faith or ethnic group so I can't talk even if I want to.

Barriers for ethnic minority communities

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Racism causes
mistrust and
uncertainty

Cultural
competence vital

Valuing, supporting
and respecting
cultural context

Being prepared to
challenge
respectfully and
openly when child is
at risk

Existing vulnerabilities

Parents' own life experiences and circumstances can increase the likelihood that they may deny that the abuse has taken place

- Experiences of sexual abuse
- Experiences of domestic abuse
- Intimidation by the person / people carrying out the abuse
- Learning disability
- Mental health difficulties
- Substance misuse problems



Denial

It is not uncommon to see the mother in a state of confusion and ambivalence, swinging on a pendulum between believing the child completely one minute and not the next, or believing some but not all of it: 'I can believed this, but I cannot believe that'.

(Still, 2016:19)

A normal and functional defence that allows us to protect ourselves against something that is painful and distressing.
(The American Psychiatric Association, 1994)

From a trauma processing perspective, features such as denial, unfocussed anger, minimisation of the problem and ambivalence toward both the alleged victim and abuser would be considered part of the course, rather than evidence of toxic parenting or deep seated psychopathology. (Chaffin, 1996)

The spectrum of belief

Believes and does not need support to protect

Believes but needs support to protect

Remains in position of not believing but accepts concerns of others and will accept help

Ambivalent, takes little action, but will allow child to have intervention and support

Does not accept, cannot protect, will not accept help and will not allow child to have help



BUT not absolute – our task is to move people along the continuum

The impact of child sexual abuse on parents and carers

Contextual Factors for non-abusing parents

A sexual abuse investigation and all that that entails

The worry (or actual) loss of their child

The worry (or actual) loss of their partner

Limited support for themselves

Being treated with suspicion

Isolation

Hostile response from friends/family/comm unity

Physical threats or actual violence and may need re-housing

Will be frightened to say how they think or feel

Raw emotion

Weariness and desperation

Anger and frustration (often towards agencies, may be avoidance)

And the negative consequences of this...

Leaves them open to
further manipulation
and abuse by the
person of concern



**None of it empowers
them to:**

- Protect their children
- Make informed decisions
- Be a supportive external monitor to the person of concern (should they choose to remain with them)

Ongoing impact on parents and carers



Mental and physical health

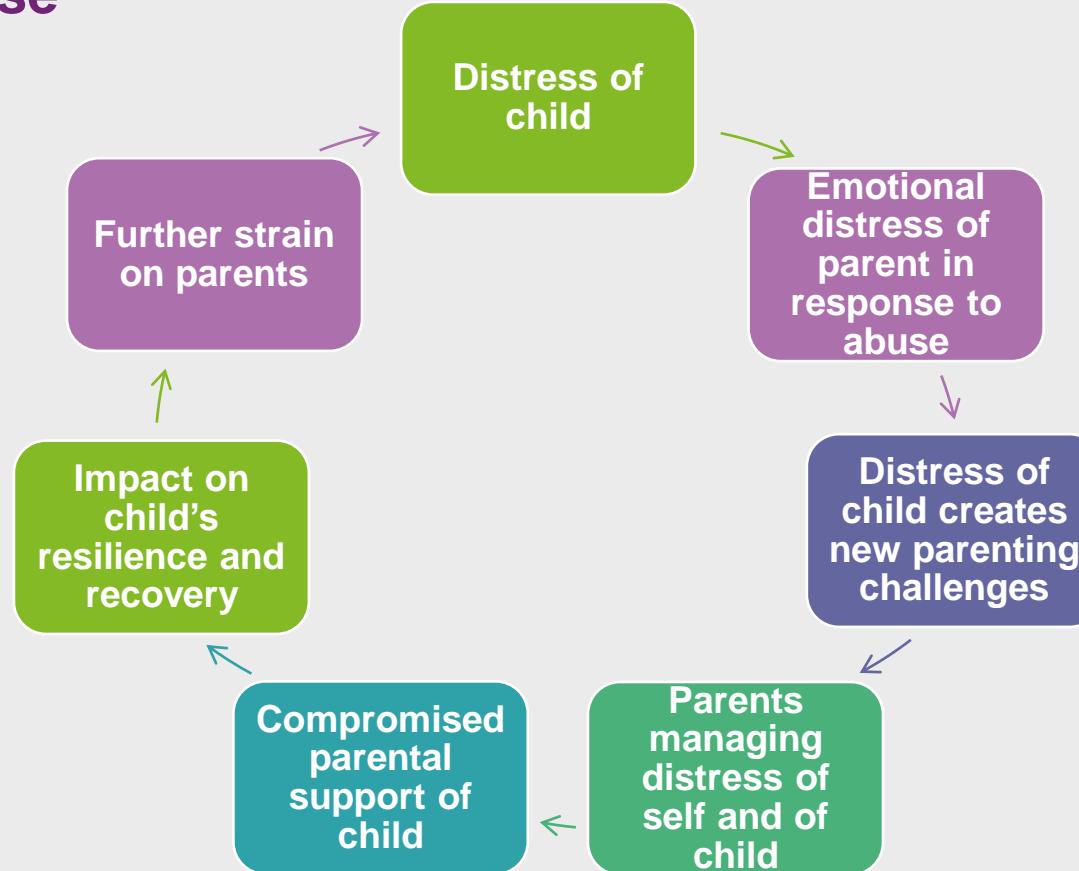
Relationships

Living arrangements

Day-to-day life

Safeguarding and
investigative processes

Challenges of parenting a distressed child following child sexual abuse



“Sexual abuse is not an act or an incident but the corruption of a relationship.”

Jenny Still, 2016

Supportive actions you can take

Key elements of a supportive approach

Ensuring safety

Including and involving parents

Being non-judgemental

Being sensitive to parents' trauma

Showing compassion & humanity

Recognising parents' strengths

Being direct & open

Using respectful language

Providing continuity

Supportive actions you can take

Share	Share information about the abuse
Answer	Answer parents' questions
Explain	Explain what may happen next
Help	Help parents access support
Clarify	Clarify roles, responsibilities and actions
Help	Help parents cope if the abuse is ongoing
Offer	Offer hope



Supporting parents' relationships with their child

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Supporting your child

- **Believe your child/your own instincts.** Let your child know that you believe them and take them seriously – or, in situations where they do not acknowledge the abuse, keep telling them that you are concerned for them, that they can talk to you, and that you won't blame them.
- **Help them understand it wasn't their fault.** It's likely that your child will feel responsible for what has happened to them, so it's important for you to help them realise that it wasn't their fault and that they are not to blame. You may need to explain this to them in detail, to counteract what the person who abused them may have made them believe.
- **Let them know you are on their side.** Tell them that you are going to help them, and that you will get through this together.
- **Stay calm.** Becoming upset, angry or out of control will make it harder for your child to feel they can talk to you about what has happened or how they are feeling. You may feel strong emotions yourself: try to have someone safe, other than your child, with whom you can explore your feelings.
- **Be ready to listen to them.** Give them time to talk to you at their own pace, and avoid asking intrusive questions.
- **Get support for yourself.** Your child will need to feel you are calm and in control. Seeking support will help you to support your child.



Offering practical advice to parents and carers

- Identify **safe adults and peers**
- Help them **express their feelings**
- **Firm, consistent and realistic** boundaries
- **Positive** affirmations
- **Play**
- **Relaxation**
- **Routine and normality**
- **Understand** feelings of anger and confusion
- **Managing** flashbacks or panic attacks
- **Don't make promises**

Support relating to child sexual abuse in different contexts

Sexual abuse by an adult in the family

Sexual abuse by a child in the family

Sexual abuse by a trusted adult outside the family

Sexual abuse by a group of adults

Sexual abuse online

Sexual harm by another child outside the family

Ritual sexual abuse

Support for parents in specific situations

Providing effective support to parents whose circumstances mean they may have particular needs

Parents experiencing domestic abuse

Fathers

Parents with learning disabilities/difficulties

Parents experiencing other forms of stigma and discrimination

Meeting your own needs

Taking care of yourself

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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!

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