

The logo features a square background with a geometric pattern of triangles in shades of blue, purple, and green. The text is white and positioned in the lower-left corner of the square.

Centre of
expertise
on child
sexual abuse

Workshop: **Managing risk and trauma after online sexual offending**

Dr Natasha Sabin

19 June 2024

Session outline



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

Setting the scene

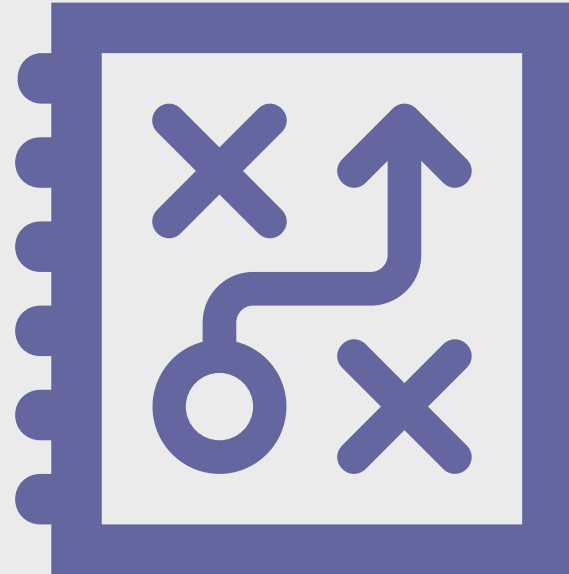
Professionals must consider the whole family

Discovering that someone in your family, who may be the parent of your child(ren), has accessed child sexual abuse material **is likely to be one of the most traumatic experiences any family will go through.**



What challenges do you face in practice?

What challenges do **you** face in supporting families where a parent has committed a sexual offence online?



Holding it all in mind

We need to be able to hold in mind all possible risks

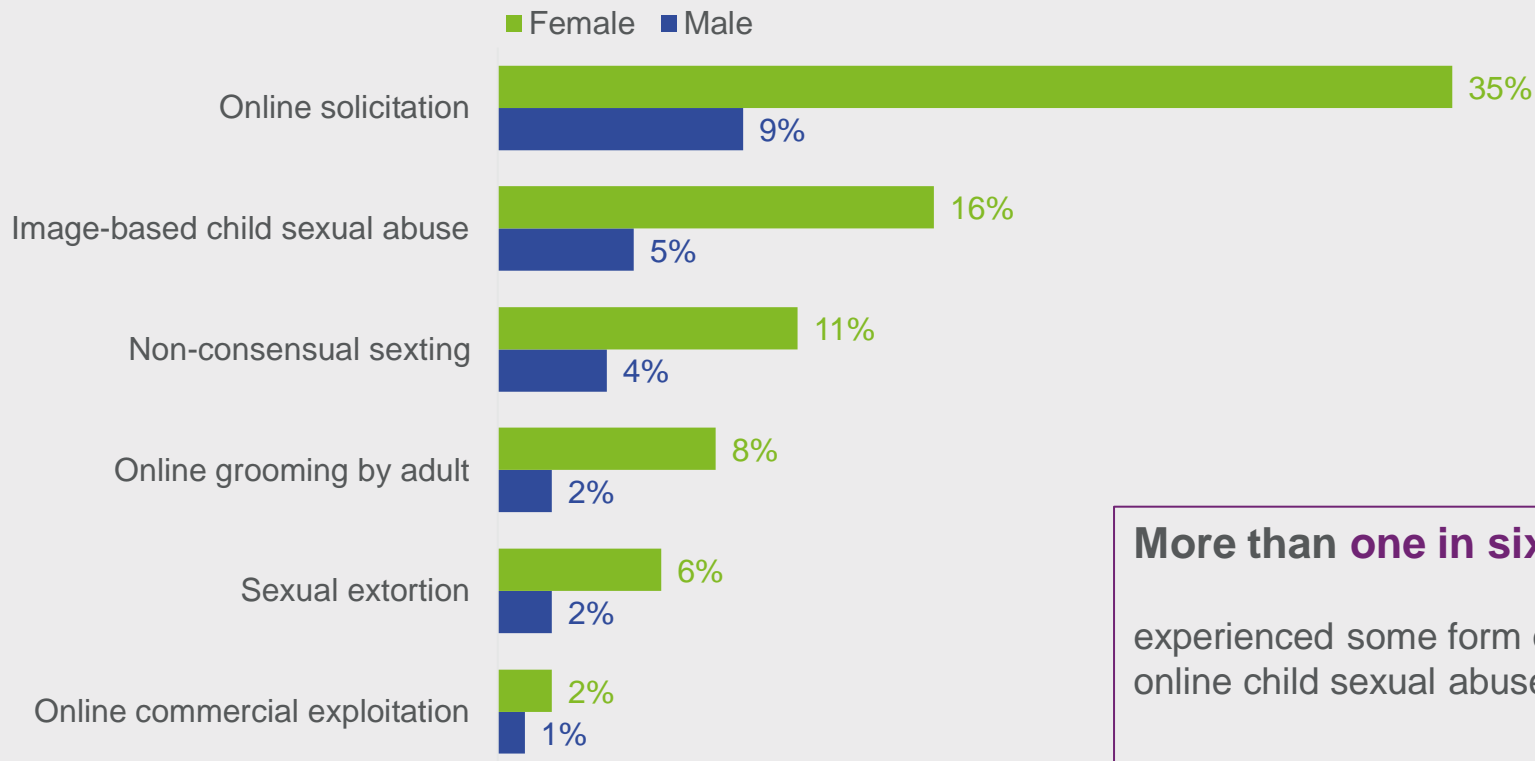
- The child(ren) may have already been sexually abused,
- The offending parent may subsequently sexually abuse their own child(ren)
- The non-offending parent and the child(ren) are likely to experience a significant trauma as a result of 'the knock'
- There is a very real possibility that the offending parent may complete or attempt suicide.



“Child sexual exploitation and abuse online is one of the most urgent and defining issues of our generation”

WeProtect Global Alliance, 2021

Scale of online child sexual abuse



More than one in six

experienced some form of
online child sexual abuse

“Offences of sexual violence against children of which there is recorded footage are particularly traumatic for the child. [...] Awareness that there is a video recording or photograph of their sexual abuse, coupled with the fear of its possible spread and eternal circulation online can have a life-long devastating impact. Each time the CSAM is viewed again, the child is re-victimised.”

Suojellaan Lapsia ry. / Protect Children 2021

The impact of discovery on the whole family

“There’s got to be a mistake. My Dad doesn’t do that. He’s not like that. Surely the police are at the wrong door. They’ve got the wrong person. I sat on the pavement, my legs shaking”

The Knock

The impact on the child(ren) in the home

The impact on the child(ren)

**Parental mental
health difficulties**

**Parental separation
or divorce**

Stigmatisation

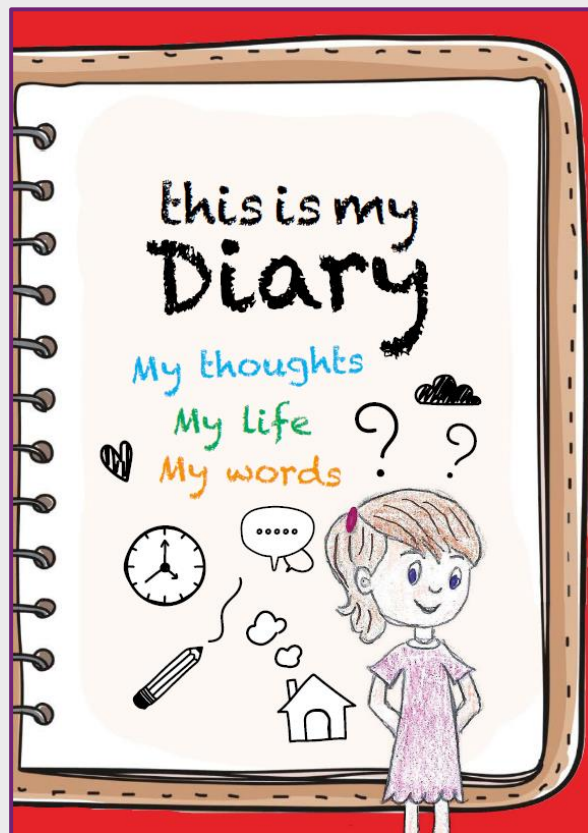
**Disruptions in family
bonding
opportunities**

**Parental
imprisonment**

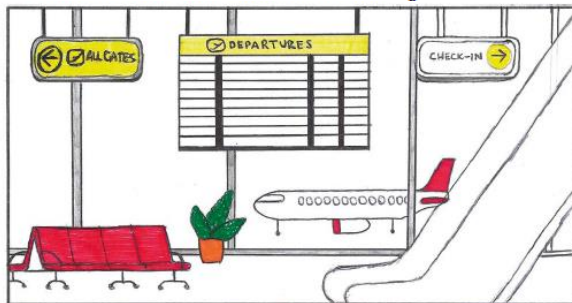
**Knowledge of their
parent's offending**

Hearing from young people

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One week before the knock... we were heading out on our holiday



The knock



The police came



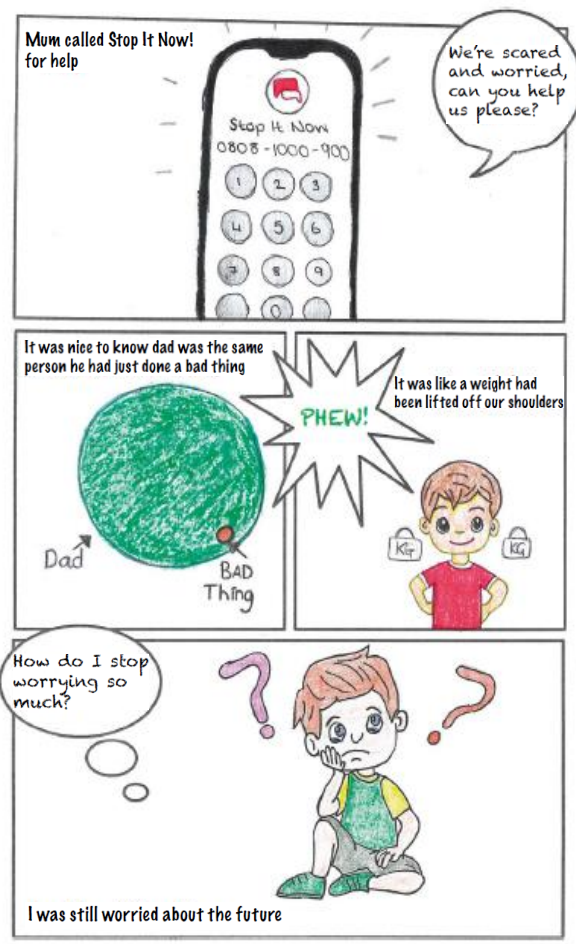
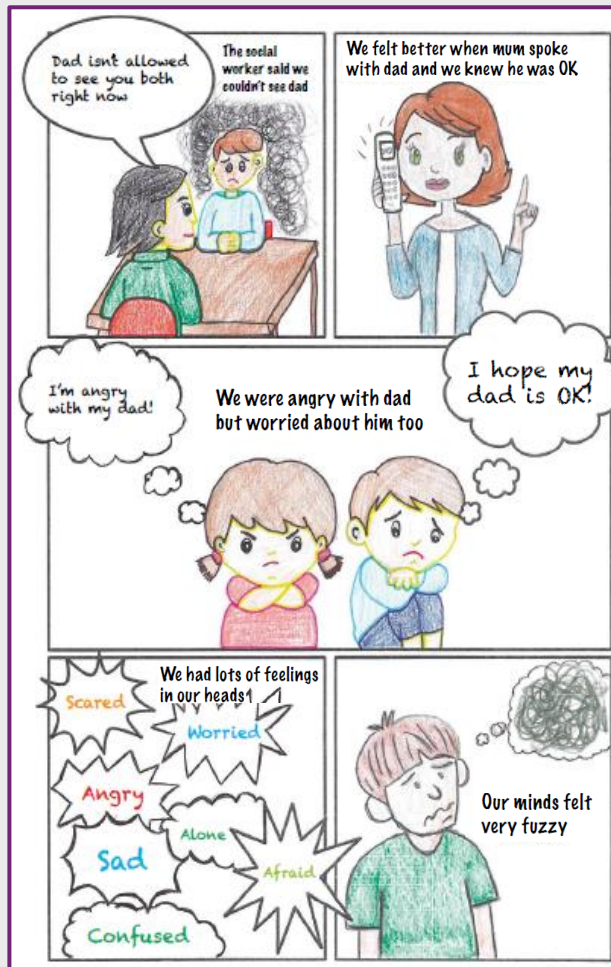
They took away all our devices



They took dad away



We had a dark cloud over our family



Talking about how we feel and learning coping skills stops us from being overwhelmed



We created safe places to hold our worries...

Worry Jar



Happy Memory Jar



... and our happy memories

We kept a diary of how we felt each day



Feeling happier and more positive



We were happier and so was mum. Our home felt happier

We still haven't seen dad but we know it's not forever. In the meantime... we still go to school...



have days out...



play with friends



We even went on holiday



We know we will see dad soon

The impact on the partner

“It's an indescribable feeling of **despair**, and it comes with a lot of emotions: **shame; grief; embarrassment; association; worry**; your **reputation's** on the line, you worry about your home being a **target**. There's a hell of a lot to process, and then on top of it, you've got to go to work and carry on as normal, and then you're told you're **not allowed to speak to anyone**”

A partner of a male arrested for accessing images of child sexual abuse. Quoted in Armitage et al, 2023

Understanding the impact on the non-offending parent

The strongest emotions following 'The Knock' appear to relate to:

1. The **shock** of the discovery
2. The turmoil arising from their difficulties involved **in making sense of the revelation**

Trying to make sense of what has happened can lead to making excuses, denial and minimisation

Understanding the reactions of the non-offending parent



*For many, the picture emerging of their partner is far removed from what they know (or think they know) of the person they love and trust – so much so that their initial reactions are likely to include “**It can’t possibly be true,**” or “**You must have the wrong person.**”*

The impact on the parent who has offended

Increased risk of suicide

There is a recognised increase in the risk of suicide amongst men who have been arrested for accessing child sexual abuse images with risk for suicide estimated to be **100 times higher** than that reported in the general population.

(Key et al., 2021)

Several complex, interlinking factors have been identified as associated with risk, including:

- **Shame**
- **Absence of prior criminal contact**
- **Impact of a criminal investigation**

Understanding risk and safety

Making decisions about risk and safety



What we know about future risk

- There is a body of research which suggests adults who have accessed child sexual abuse images present a **relatively low risk of re-offending** through committing an offline offence.
- The risk of 'cross-over' (moving from online offending to offline offending or vice versa) is thought to be more likely to be **from offline offending to viewing child sexual abuse images** than the other way around.
- Emerging research suggests that a significant number of adults who had viewed child sexual abuse images self-report having **sought direct contact with children through online platforms after viewing child sexual abuse images** (42% in research by Protect Children).

So, what does this mean for practice?

Making initial
decisions about
risk and safety

Talking to the
child(ren)

Making referrals

Safety planning

Ongoing
assessment in
light of additional
information

Making early decisions about risk to children and ensuring children's safety

“We found that higher-frequency CSAM users, those with a higher onset age, users who view CSAM depicting toddlers and infants, those who have thoughts of self-expressing, and users in contact with other CSAM users were all more likely to self-report that they had attempted to contact children online after viewing CSAM/illegal violent material.”

Insoll, Ovaska, Nurmi, Aaltonen, & Vaaranen-Valkonen (2022)

Making initial decisions about risk and safety

Professionals working with children and families need to look out for signs that children in the home have been sexually abused. For example:



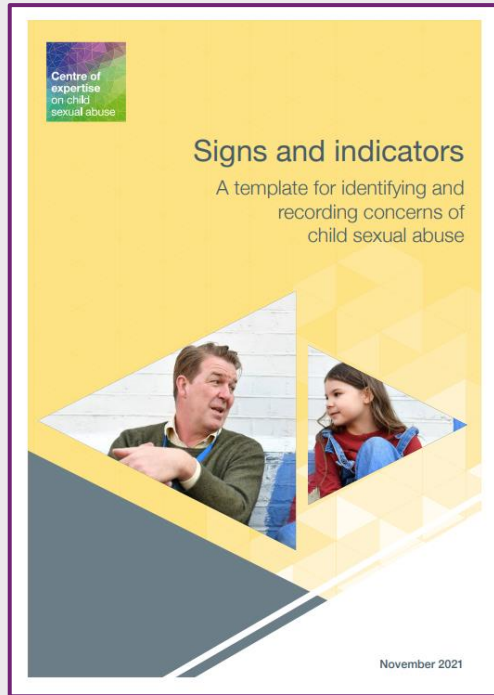
Are the children thriving?

What is their relationship like with the person under investigation?

What is their relationship like with other adults in the family home?

To what degree could they voice their concerns (age, vulnerability, disability, etc)?

Noticing the signs and indicators



You can use the **Signs and Indicators Template** to help you think about:

- Any physical, emotional or behavioural signs of sexual abuse the child has shown
- Any behaviours displayed by the offending adult which might suggest they pose a risk to their own child(ren)
- Any factors within the family or environment which may increase opportunities for abuse to occur

<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-resources/practice-resources/signs-and-indicators/>

Assessment considerations



What do you know about the offending parent's online activity?



How and when did they initially access the material?



What do you know about the material they are viewing?



What do you know about the offending parent's life offline?

Providing effective support for children and families

“My Mum was allowed to keep her mobile phone after it had been checked, but they took my sisters college laptop, along with 129 other devices. The entire house was search top to bottom. Dirty laundry baskets, the Christmas tree box, my dead siblings memory boxes, the bag with my wedding dress in, they even emptied out the big bag of cat food all over the floor. Every single draw, cupboard and box was turned upside down and searched.”

The Knock

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What do you want families to take away from their interactions with you?

Key elements of a supportive response

Listen and avoid
making assumptions

Be credible

Be direct and honest

Be reassuring and
humane

Be accessible

Be responsive

Be informative

Share a message of
hope

Let the family know
where to go for
additional support
and information

Support for the child

- ✓ Mitigate the impact
- ✓ Remain calm
- ✓ Offer reassurance
- ✓ Be honest
- ✓ Separate the person from the behaviour
- ✓ Plan interventions in a way that reflects best practice
- ✓ Be consistent



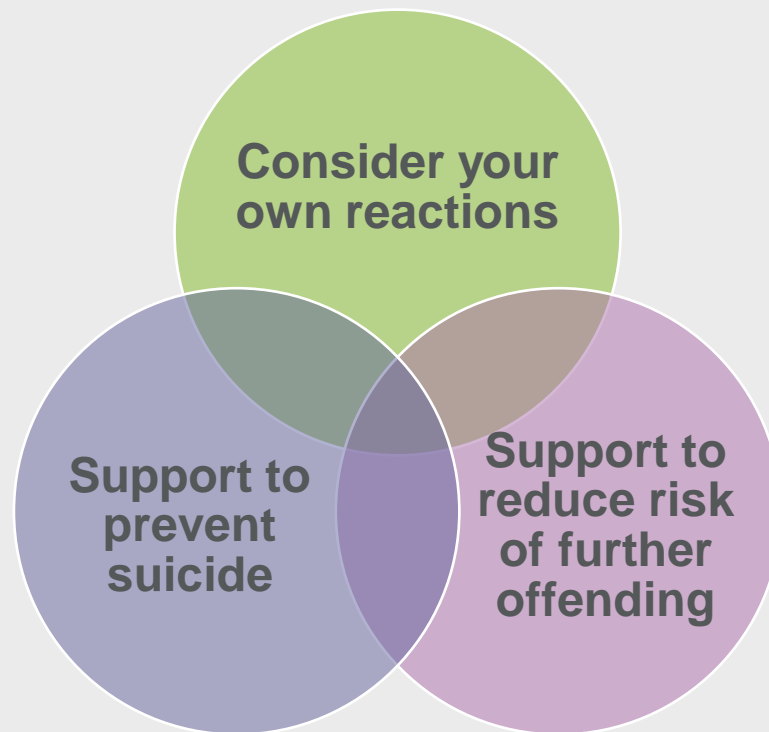
Support for the partner



- ✓ Share information honestly and check they have understood it
- ✓ Help them process what has happened
- ✓ Help them manage family life during the police investigation
- ✓ Help them consider what to tell their child(ren)

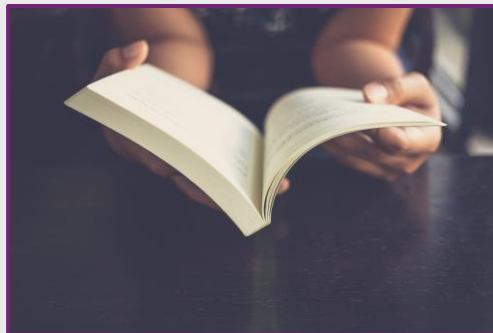
Support for the offending parent

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Taking care of yourself

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How might you use the resource in your work?



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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!

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