

Safeguarding Child Sexual Abuse



What is Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)?

“Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts, such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.”

(Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023)

CSA is most often perpetrated by someone known to the child. It is common for those who sexually abuse children to use ‘grooming’ techniques to gain compliance and ensure a child’s silence. They may use threats and force, but often use rewards, favouritism and alienation from friends and family, or take advantage of the normalisation of potentially abusive activities. Similar techniques may be used on families and colleagues to secure access to victims and prevent detection.

As early years professionals, we have a critical role in noticing the signs and indicators of CSA, particularly in children who may not have the words to express what they are experiencing.

TASK 1

Watch the following video that explores some of the signs of CSA –it's important to remember that even our youngest children can show signs of harm, often through their play, behaviour or language:

[Child Abuse Signs - We Must Know !](#)

Note – While the presence of these signs does not necessarily mean a child is experiencing CSA, it is important to remain vigilant, as these behaviours may indicate that something is troubling the child, whether related to abuse or other factors which will always warrant further exploration and support.

TASK 2

Case study:

Byron is a 3-year-old boy who has been attending nursery since he was 2 years old. He has recently become withdrawn, often avoiding physical contact, even with his key person. During nappy changes, he appears distressed and repeatedly say's 'no touch me' in a panicked tone. Staff at the nursery have also noticed that Byron is using sexualised language and sometimes displays inappropriate sexual play with the dolls and teddies...

...Byron's key worker has noted changes in his eating habits and sleep patterns, he often falls asleep during the day and has dark circles under his eyes. He has also become very anxious at home time when his mother's new partner arrives to collect him. Staff at the nursery have had ongoing conversations with Byron's mum, who appears dismissive of the concerns and explains she thinks his behaviour is just 'a phase' or 'being dramatic'.

Next, within your team reflect on the questions below:

- At what point would aspects of Byron's behaviour raise concerns for you and why? what actions would you take and when?
- When a parent or carer is dismissive about the concerns you have raised, how do you ensure the child's voice and safety remain priority?
- Do your current routines and relationships with children allow them to feel truly safe and listened to?
- In what ways does your setting encourage open and non-judgemental discussion among staff about concerns like this?
- How do you ensure observations of concerning behaviour are objective, detailed and free from making assumptions?
- How confident do you feel in identifying signs of CSA in very young children who may not have the language to disclose?
- How confident do you feel in recording and reporting these types of concerns?
- How might being involved in a case of suspected or confirmed CSA affect you personally and professionally as an early year's practitioner – what support systems are available to help manage the impact?

TASK 3

Agree on one change or improvement you can make, whether it's strengthening how concerns are shared, reviewing your safeguarding policies or improving confidence through further training.

Remember! Even the smallest of observations can be the first step in protecting a child. Trust your instincts and always share concerns with your DSL.

CSA is a vast and complex form of abuse which requires significant sensitivity and empathy from early years practitioners.

“Recognising and responding to disclosures of sexual abuse requires a delicate balance of empathy, understanding, and appropriate action, as the impact on a child's life can be profound and long-lasting”

(CSA Centre)

Useful Links:

[Sexual Abuse](#)

[Home | CSA Centre](#)

[What you need to know about child sexual abuse](#)

[The Signs and Indicators of Child Sexual Abuse: introducing our practical template \(CSA Centre\)](#)

Useful links continued:

[Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](#)

[Spotting signs of child sexual abuse - NHS](#)

[Talk PANTS: Conversation to help keep children safe | NSPCC](#)

Related Q Cards:

[Are you listening?](#)

[CSE 2 Building resilience](#)

[Professional curiosity](#)

[CSE 1 Building resilience](#)

[Disguised compliance](#)

[9-voice-of-the-child.docx](#)