



This presentation uses learning from child and parent interviews and is designed for use in team meetings and training events to share the learning and stimulate discussion about practice across the whole professional network. It assumes a prior knowledge of what CSE is and the models of CSE and grooming.

It can be used in one session or over a series of team meetings for example.

The workshop questions at the end are important as learning will be more effective if it is active rather than passively just looking at the slides and listening to them being presented.

# Background and Context

- \* In 2015 the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board undertook a Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Stock Take and conducted a Learning Review looking at a major CSE case.
- \* 11 children aged 11 to 19 years and 10 parents took part through structured interviews carried out by staff from the Engagement Team. We use the term child or children to reinforce they are child victims of abuse not young adults making poor choices.
- \* The children and parents were asked about their experiences of
  - \* 1. Help and support
  - \* 2. Services working together
  - \* 3. The Big Plan to protect children: ideas of what might help
  - \* 4. Their experience of giving evidence in court



All the children had been identified as at risk through child sexual exploitation through the completion of a CSE Screening Tool.

The sample included boys and girls, children who had been groomed and abused and those on the edge of grooming.

The sample included children who had successfully given evidence in criminal trials – both individual child/perpetrator and group based CSE cases.

The parents sample was predominantly mothers but a small number of fathers were also interviewed.

All the children and their parents agreed to be interviewed and were positive about the experience.

## What They Said Went Well

- \* Professionals especially social workers and police working well together
- \* Predominantly, current experience of social workers was positive although some people had had negative experience in the past
- \* Social workers and police “find out what was going on”
- \* Show interest and support in all aspects of child’s life.
- \* Children were treated with respect in an age appropriate way
- \* Parents and children didn’t have to repeat their stories and didn’t receive conflicting messages.



The children and parents interviewed for the Stocktake gave mixed views about their experiences and not all were positive. Those interviewed for the Learning Review were predominantly very positive although one victim (who was a young adult by the time her abuse came to light) and her parent felt they had not received the same level of service as the younger victims had.

What mattered more than anything was the quality of the relationships with those professionals working with them.

## What They Said Went Well 2

- \* Professionals got back to them, if there was a delay children and parents understood the pressure and workloads
- \* The Learning Review children reported very good, very positive experiences of the Kingfisher Team
- \* Children spoke of being “cared for and listened to”
- \* “Dr from my [Asian] community is really supportive”
- \* Court support was excellent
- \* Detective Inspector was courteous, gave info in a clear way. Back in the day I’d had previous experience of police and it was totally different from that”.



## What Children Said Was Important To Them

- \* “They need to get to know you, not just what is going on. The thing is they need to get to know you”
- \* “Keep trying and trying and fight for what I need. Social workers should really look into things. Look behind what’s going on”
- \* Care about me, understand my behaviours “I think they should carry on caring because it helps the young people who need the help, because young people need to feel confident”.
- \* Be available when I need you - *“It’s annoying when social worker is out of the office. Sometimes it’s important [what I want to tell them is important to me] and it’s frustrating and annoying not being able to get hold of them. They [the office] say ‘do you want to leave a message’ but I say no because it’s important to me and I can’t say what I wanted”*



The children in particular emphasised the relationship with the social worker because they were the professional they saw most often.

The children recognised that they had to build trust and that the social workers, police officers and nurses who worked best ‘never gave up’ and that those professionals pushed and pushed to help the child understand they were victims of abuse and be able to disclose. Children valued the workers who knew when to push and when to ‘back off’.

The children recognised that their behaviours were sometimes very bad and hard to deal with but wanted professionals to understand why they were behaving badly. Children spoke about ‘being bad’ in school as a technique to get sent to ‘time out areas’ or to the counsellor or nurse because the support staff working in those areas were the people they could trust.

The children were incredibly needy and demanding and could not cope if the person they wanted, often the social worker, was not available there and then when they needed them. Some social workers put in place contact agreements with the child for example being able to text and get a quick response even if the social worker was working with other children.

## What Children Said Was Important To Them

- \* The children were concerned about what would happen to them if they told someone and needed to know the process and the implications
- \* Children who didn't want their parents to know thought it should be their choice to share or not as they consider themselves 'old enough' to decide.



The issue of not wanting parents to know was a major dilemma. Some children wanted to protect their parents, some were embarrassed or ashamed about what had happened to them and almost all did not want their parents to have intimate details about their life.

Most of the children did not want their parents in court when they gave evidence for the same reasons and many parents found that difficult as they wanted to support their child. This was even harder for the parents when the child asked their social worker or a police officer to be with them in court.

What parents were going to be told needed to be agreed with the child and explained to the parents, or for a young child the need to share with parents needed explaining carefully to the child.

## What Parents Said Was Important To Them

- \* Good relationships with social worker is essential and the tenacity and support of the social workers really makes a difference
- \* A clear and consistent approach as to what will and won't be shared with parents and why
- \* Communication with parents – tension sometimes about what parents should know and what their child wants them to know
- \* “Know that it’s hard for the parents to hear what’s happened. The social workers should know she is going to get the brunt of me; she needs to know that and not let it get to her”



As with the children relationships with the social worker mattered most to parents because they saw them most frequently.

When this worked well it was positive but sometimes those relationships were strained, especially when the parents were not seen as acting appropriately to protect their child.

Parents understood they could not be told everything – for example confidential details of the investigation – but they needed this explaining to them from the start.

Most parents did not accept that information about their child should not be shared with them and workers were often caught in difficult situations about the child's wishes and the parents wishes, especially with older children.

Parents needed to vent their hurt and anger about what had happened to their child and saw the social worker as being the person they could vent off to. This was very hard for some social workers as it would manifest as a personal and critical attack on them.

## What Parents Said Was Important To Them

- \* Ask how involved a parent wants to be - some parents want to be included to a greater degree and wanted to feel more involved “work with us” , “don’t keep us in the dark” “tell us even if its hard”
- \* Tell us where the perpetrators are living or might be hanging out so you can protect them, so we can stop it from happening



There were tensions about the perpetrators and what the families could be told about them especially early in the investigation when the police were gathering intelligence and there were risks of ‘tipping off’ those who were under suspicion.

## How Partners Need To Work Together

- \* Keep working together. Schools need to work more with Social Services.
- \* Different agencies talk to each other and share information
- \* Greater collaboration needed between health and schools.



When partners worked well together parents and children could see that and appreciated it. They valued professionals sharing information and not having to keep telling their story and there was some excellent practice where professionals agreed with the child what information they were going to share – in one case with maternity services which meant the child victim received a sensitive and caring response without having to disclose her abuse to a stranger.

Conversely one child was very angry that her CAMH's worker and social worker shared information feeling her time with the therapist 'was private'. The professionals were right to share that information given the level of risk to the child.

## Messages For Schools and Other Settings

- \* It is critical that places where children go e.g. schools, Early Intervention Hubs have their eyes and ears open be “on alert”
- \* Schools must look beyond the behaviours
- \* Schools should be supporting and encouraging children to do well at school and in exams
- \* Children need to be in school and safe



Children saw school in particular as somewhere where they were safe. There was evidence of them not being safe when excluded from school, out-of-school because of partial timetables or truanting.

Where schools got it right they were invaluable partners and children, parents and other professionals recognised that.

Too many children felt school did not try to look beyond their (admittedly) very difficult and challenging behaviour and that schools didn't try hard enough to understand.

For some children 'doing well' in school, working towards their exams was an oasis of normality in an otherwise chaotic and dangerous life.

Children wanted schools, hubs, young people's projects, specialist services such as sexual health clinics to understand the signs of CSE, to be actively looking for them and to talk to the child about any concerns.

## The Skills and Qualities Children Want Professionals To Have

- \* Social workers and police need to be consistent, trusted, reliable, persistent, reassuring and incredibly dedicated “it’s not just a job to them”.
- \* Social workers, in particular, need to be involving, straight talking, caring, have experience, mature and be non-judgemental.
- \* Being skilled in drawing out information from children Being ‘sneaky’ and being able to “slide in the sneakies” is a necessary skill and in retrospect was recognised and admired.



The children were very clear about what skills workers needed – and saw this as being the difference between a professional they eventually trusted enough to disclose to and one where they never would. They wanted professionals to be both understanding and challenging. They saw the need for professionals to believe them (when they spoke about being abused) but to not believe them when they were unable to talk about the abuse (because of fear, the grooming, still believing they were ‘in a relationship’, normalising the sexual activity etc). This creates a professional dilemma which needs a highly skilled practitioner.

‘Sneakies’ is a term one girl used to describe how various professionals would ask the tricky questions which eventually helped her to disclose her abuse. She called them ‘sneakies’ because she reflected that she would be chatting to the professional about general things and they would slide in a question seeking information about what had happened to her.

## Skills and Qualities 2

- \* Pace around disclosure needs to be set by the child  
“Waiting until the person is ready to talk”
- \* Social workers need to carefully and sensitively find ways to change child’s perception of their situation
- \* Information should be provided throughout and stay in contact after the court case
- \* Put time aside to involve young people and check that they feel involved and part of things
- \* Practical things helped – diaries, phone numbers, copy of plans and being available out of hours



The children felt professionals needed to go at their pace with the disclosure but also saw that sometimes they needed to be pushed. They spoke about workers knowing when to ‘back off’ and if they didn’t the child would either ‘kick off’ or close down’. They valued professionals who understood this, who could give them space and not judge them and most of all who kept coming back no matter how angry and abusive the child may have been. A text after an outburst ‘just checking you are OK and I’m here for you’ meant a lot.

Those children who were preparing for court or those managing complex support arrangements in particular valued things like being given a diary to help keep track of appointments and dates coming up. Having direct numbers for workers and understanding they didn’t want to go through admin or switchboard meant a lot.

Having a written plan helped. This was especially useful when it set out things like how often the social worker would see them, call them, text them. Order in a chaotic life mattered a lot.

## Skills and Qualities 3

- \* Just don't give up on a person. Keep listening, 'cause if I said I didn't like something it wouldn't carry on they would stop doing it."
- \* "It depends if they get to know you, the things is they need to get to know you"
- \* Police officers missed chances to intervene on occasions. All police officers need to "think CSE"



Sometimes the children felt they were listened to too much. Professionals needed to be skilled in interpreting the language of the child. For example 'fuck off' meant 'help me I'm scared', 'Go away' meant 'can I trust you to care and stick with me', 'I don't want to talk about that anymore' meant 'this is getting really hard so help me with it'. We need to listen to what the child is saying with their eyes, with their body language and not just their voice. But also sometimes 'fuck off' means 'right now I really do need you to back off this – but come back later, please'.

# Attitudes & Values Matter

- \* Make it loud and clear it's no one's fault apart from the person who did it. One person judging you could potentially be keeping predators out there"
- \* A passive response from a professional can add to a child's sense of CSE as "normal"
- \* Professionals, have status and influence a child's comprehension of their situation e.g. sexual health worker not questioning a girls sexual behaviour can enforce feeling that it is 'normal'.



Whilst we know that sometimes factors in the child's early or family life may make them particularly vulnerable to grooming and CSE and some children do not have the benefit of a protective family environment care must be taken not to 'blame' those factors for the abuse. The only people responsible for the abuse are the perpetrators and children and families need to hear that message.

Children spoke about 'testing out' the reaction of adults through stepped disclosures. How the adult reacted determined whether they would tell them more. If the adult was shocked or upset the child would probably not tell them anything more. Conversely a 'passive response' gave the child a message that the professional was not concerned – so there is a balance to strike. Not shock/horror but an empathetic understanding that what has happened is wrong and the child will be helped.

In the sexual health setting some children saw what the professionals thought was a professional non-judgemental response and accepting the abusive sexual activity as normal and left them further confused.

## Do's

- \* Do make sure help comes at the right time / early on
- \* Make sure children have someone to trust
- \* Keep asking if I am OK.
- \* Emphasise sex and relationship education
- \* Check if what children are saying is true, the police should check out their story
- \* Find out the age gap between the child and who they are "going out with"
- \* Leave time to spare between appointment to manage the 'doorstep effect'



The 'doorstep effect' is the child's way of saying they leave telling you the really important thing until you are just about to leave .. And they don't want you to leave it hanging.

## ...and Don'ts

- \* Don't share information without telling me and listen if I say I don't want you to
- \* Don't contact me only when you want something from me - swab, gathering information, statements, it makes me feel 'done to'
- \* Don't blame the parents, they should believe and work with parents
- \* Don't make promises, in case they can't be followed through
- \* Don't give up on me
- \* Don't leave us not knowing what will happen regarding the release of convicted perpetrators



## We Need More Of...

- \* More counselling / therapeutic support and continued support offered or handled in a way that make the child feel safe. If they had a counsellor they wanted to carry on with them when they got to 18
- \* More public awareness and who to go to for help.
- \* More preparation for media coverage and guidance of how to deal with the impact on children
- \* More support for individual families to understanding what has happened and be able to deal with it in a helpful way.



## Parents Ideas About What Else To Do

- \* “People’s own community should do more [the Muslim community]. Be more blunt with the message around Muslim community. You can’t fanny around the subject for worry of appearing to be racist”
- \* Increase public awareness and give information about CSE and what to do if you are worried about a child
- \* Increase awareness of where to go for help (people don't always want to go to the police). “I didn’t want to go to the police, but other than to go to the police, who do you turn to?”



## Parents Ideas About What Else To Do

- \* Remember the quiet, introverted children too. “Even when there is a good family network the child still needs support. The quiet ones you have to watch out for – they are the most emotional. The ‘high maintenance’ ones they can take your time but the quiet ones need attention too”
- \* Provide support to parents. No counselling or support was offered; can’t talk to friends and that was hard”. Someone talking to us would have helped us to understand
- \* Parents wanted to know what practical steps to take regarding gathering evidence and reporting incidents



## Children's Ideas About What Else To Do

- \* More education and training at school to understand and spot CSE.
- \* Give more warning and be well prepared that the defence lawyer in court could be aggressive and personal
- \* Make the child aware of what personal information the defence lawyer may have
- \* Children and young people who are gay, or bisexual or transgender need to be treated sensitively



# Workshop 1

- \* Think about a child you have worked with and how they communicated with you. Did you look beyond the words?
- \* What skills do you need to build a trusting relationship with a child?
- \* What breaks that trust?
- \* How have you demonstrated to a child that you will 'never give up' on them or have you given up?
- \* If you have given up what could you have done differently?



## Workshop 2

- \* Think about a child who has shown difficult behaviour. How could you try to understand that behaviour better?
- \* Think about a child where you suspect they may be at risk through CSE. How might you start to talk to the child about your concerns?
- \* You need to share information about a child with another professional. Would you talk to the child about that? What would you say? What if the child says I don't want you to?



# Workshop 3

- \* Think of a situation where you have faced a conflict between the wishes of a child and the wishes of a parent. How did you handle it and what could you have done better?
- \* How would you support a parent whose child is at risk through CSE?
- \* How would you work with a parent who is not acting protectively towards a child who is at risk through CSE?

