



SUPPORTING PARENTS AND CARERS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AFFECTED BY SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

A TOOLKIT FOR PROFESSIONALS

In collaboration with

**The
Children's
Society**

**No child
should feel
alone**



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PLEASE NOTE: This toolkit is based on our current understanding and the evidence picture of support for parents. Therefore this document will remain a living document and is subject to change.

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In collaboration with



INTRODUCTION

Supporting and working alongside parents and carers is key to the safeguarding process. Parents and carers are usually the people who spend most time with their children, know them best, love them and are invested in their well-being. It is important to consider how, as professionals, we ensure that they feel appropriately supported in order to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

This document assumes that the reader has an understanding of child sexual exploitation (CSE) which is a type of child sexual abuse (CSA). For further information on child sexual exploitation please refer to The Children's Society website: <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-is-child-sexual-exploitation>

THE IMPACT OF CSE ON PARENTS AND CARERS

Parents may be supporting a child who is suffering with the effects of trauma, and whilst trauma affects everyone differently it may include PTSD, depression, flashbacks, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, aggression, or a child exhibiting a range of other responses as a result of being abused.ⁱ The child's responses to the abuse may in turn be traumatic and worrying for parents who may not have an understanding of how the effects of trauma can appear. Enabling parents to understand how their child's experience of trauma could manifest may help lessen the worry and anxiety that parents and carers feel, and could help them to understand how they can better support their child. The Children's Society have recently produced a guide entitled 'Trauma and Young People – A Guide for Parents, Carers and Professionals' which may be useful for this purpose.ⁱⁱ

Finding out that their child has been abused can have a profound impact on the well-being of a parent or carer. 'Following a disclosure of CSA, most parents experience psychological and emotional distress'ⁱⁱⁱ and this may last for a considerable period of time.

Scott and McNeish (2017) conducted an evidence review in relation to Supporting Parents of Sexually Exploited Young People. They refer to literature relating to other forms of sexual abuse and draw parallels with the amount of distress parents feel, trauma relating to disclosure and the 'toxic combination of blame, shame and guilt that many parents experience.'^{iv}

Therefore, in addition to understanding the impact of trauma on their child, parents and carers also need support to deal with the trauma they have experienced and to promote and protect their own emotional well-being.

Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation (PACE) (2016) commissioned the University of Worcester to conduct a health survey of parents affected by CSE.

Eighty eight percent of respondents felt that CSE had impacted their health. In addition to psychological problems, the respondents described suffering from headaches, stomach pains, breathing difficulties and chest pains. Parents with pre-existing health conditions felt that CSE had impacted on their ability to manage those conditions, and there was also an acknowledgement that parents put their caring for their child and work pressure before their own health needs.^v

Sleep deprivation as a result of stress and anxiety (or through, for example, being awake during the night when a child is missing) can also have a detrimental impact on the health of parents and carers. Continued lack of sleep can also lead to problems with immunity, depression and low mood, weight, fertility and lead to serious health conditions.^{vi} In the aforementioned University of Worcester report 84% of parents of sexually exploited young people surveyed thought that their sleep patterns had been disturbed as a result of their experiences.

The impact of CSE can extend to relationships between parents and carers which can be put under strain, and on siblings who may feel that they are not getting enough attention, may be bullied by peers, or may be at risk themselves.^{vii}

Parents social networks may also suffer, as they may feel unable to tell friends about their experience. Parents and carers may feel that their friends will not be able to understand what they are going through or relate to them, or may feel stigmatised or unable to talk about what they have experienced.^{viii} Scott and McNeish (2017) also looked at the importance of enabling access to both formal and informal support. In relation to peer support (where parents can talk to others who have experienced similar circumstances) stated 'the evidence strongly suggests that parents value peer support from parents with similar experiences, and support from professionals who have some appreciation of what they are experiencing.'^{ix}

In some cases parents and carers can be faced with intimidation and abuse from perpetrators or their associates. In cases where the perpetrator(s) are known, the police may be able to use their powers to intervene and prosecute.

The practical implications of having to take time off work – in order to help children with the effects of trauma, because of parents own mental or physical health issues or due to the need to attend meetings arranged by professionals – can have an economic impact on families. Parents and carers may need to take sickness leave and unpaid leave, which in turn can lead to financial pressure and additional stress.

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSES TO YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR PARENTS AND CARERS

Thomas and D'Arcy (2017) writing for the British Journal of Social Work in an article entitled 'Combatting Child Sexual Exploitation with Young People and Parents: Contributions to a Twenty-First-Century Family Support Agenda' refers to a 2016 Ofsted report which finds that commitment to prevent and respond to CSE at a strategic level does not always relate to practice. They also refer to findings of the charity PACE and assert that 'family support for young people, parents and carers affected by CSE is patchy, inconsistent and frequently missing altogether.'^x Thomas and D'Arcy also talk about a disconnect between the specialist support services which are predominantly based within the voluntary sector and social care, who are often the first to have contact with families.^{xi}

Scott and McNeish (2017) describe how there can be a mismatch between the point of view of statutory agencies and the families of children affected by CSA and cite three main reasons for this:

- Safeguarding approaches have been largely designed around younger children and not the needs of older children and their families.
- The conventional social care model sees abuse as occurring within the family setting and looks inwards towards the family (when with CSE the perpetrator is outside the family).
- Children have been looked at in isolation rather than agencies adopting an approach based on the family.^{xii}

PACE state that the conventional child protection model may also compound perceptions that parents are partly responsible for their child's exploitation and that parents may also feel disempowered by statutory agencies. This combination of blame and disempowerment may mean families are less likely to engage, which in turn may lead to a breakdown in communication and a loss of focus by all parties on safeguarding the child.

Parents whose children go into the care of the Local Authority also need to be included in the safeguarding process. Ensuring that the parent/child bond is maintained is essential, particularly in minimising difficulties in care planning and transitions from care back to home. A 2016 report compiled by the Parent Action Group within PACE entitled 'Parents Speak Out' surveyed parents of children at risk/being exploited on a number of issues.

Parents were asked whether they had ever been prevented from having contact with their children. Over half of respondents consulted said that they had. The report explained that in some cases parents had taken the difficult decision to allow their children to go into care for their own protection. The report recommends that residential care providers work on maintaining and building relationships between parent and children, along with ensuring there is a detailed exit plan from care.^{xiii}

There is research evidence to suggest that positive relationships between parents and practitioners improve outcomes for children.^{xiv} As a result, professional responses to parents and carers affected by CSE are crucial. PACE have developed the Relational Safeguarding Model which is a way of working with the family, including parents as key stakeholders in the safeguarding process.^{xv} Approaches to families should be strengths-based and outcomes-focused. 'Parents need consistent, reliable, respectful and honest relationships with key professionals who maintain a clear focus on outcomes for the young person and the parents' role in helping to achieve these.'^{xvi}

The way in which support is offered should be considered. The NWG in their summary of recommendations for local authorities and LSCBs (drawn from numerous reports, inquiries, SCRs and research) recommend that people who work with parents should have specialist knowledge, relational skills, and experience of family centred/victim centred working. The NWG also state that consideration should be given to the benefits of having an Independent Parent Support Worker, and also to assigning separate workers for parents and carers, and that there should be continuity to build trusting, productive relationships.^{xvii} This also supports an evaluation of the Barnardo's FCASE project, where parallel working (having one worker for the parent and one for the child) strengthened the family relationships.^{xviii}

The duration of support given to family members and the ability to access ongoing support is also important. Children may experience the effects of trauma for a considerable period of time. When police investigations are being conducted, a case may take months (or even years) to go to court and the impact of having a court case looming and dealing with the aftermath of a court case may also require support for a child and their parents/carers and siblings.

BARRIERS TO PARENTS AND CARERS ACCESSING SUPPORT

For a variety of reasons, it may be difficult for parents to access support services. The signs of CSE may sometimes be missed, meaning parents and professionals may not realise a child is at risk of being exploited until the risk of abuse has escalated. As a result, parents may identify that they need support at a later stage and professionals may initially think that families do not meet thresholds for support.

As referred to previously, parents may feel ashamed or stigmatised and so may not want to seek additional support. They may also have had negative experiences with statutory agencies in the past – which could be in relation to children’s social care and their current family situation, or experiences in their own childhood – or they may have had a poor experience in relation to reporting crimes and the outcomes in relation to criminal investigations historically. Parents and carers from BME communities may also be disadvantaged due to language barriers and a lack of cultural awareness (and appreciation of the diversity of BME communities) on the part of services. Parents may also feel that there is a ‘double stigma’ of feeling guilt and shame and accessing support from outside the family.^{xix}

SUPPORTING PARENTS AND CARERS

The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse have summarised considerations around support for parents with this useful infographic:

Source: Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (2017)



Supporting parents of sexually exploited young people

Parents may need support for...

Their relationship with their child: including understanding teenage development.



Their own emotional needs: including dealing with the trauma of child sexual exploitation.

Dealing with systems: including having someone who can advocate for them.



Building their resilience: including accessing the professional and peer support they require.

Important principles for those developing and delivering support services...

Recognise ongoing trauma

Parents may experience ongoing trauma and distress over their own past experience.

Be aware of shame and stigma

It is important professionals challenge rather than reinforce this feeling.

Recognise and reduce isolation

Appreciate how parents can become isolated through trauma and stigma, and help them recover and build new support networks.

Provide support for parents and young people

Support for the young person should be integrated where possible with support to the parents.

Enable parents to access support

Formal and informal support need to be identified and support may need to be arranged in order to build/rebuild social networks. Evidence suggests peer support from parents who have similar experiences are highly valued.

To read the full study, please visit www.csacentre.org.uk/research-publications/supporting-parents

PRACTICAL TIPS

The following list includes a range of practical tips and recommendations for professionals when working with parents and carers of children and young people affected by child sexual exploitation.

- Help parents to obtain a better understanding of CSE (different forms of CSE, the grooming process etc).
- Help parents to understand how their children may respond to trauma.
- Be child focused and have a strengths-based, outcomes-focused approach when working with the family.
- Help parents to strengthen relationships with their children.
- Consider the PACE Relational Safeguarding Model – be inclusive and involve parents and carers in the safeguarding process.
- Actively listen to what parents, carers and family members say.
- Be non-judgemental and respectful.
- Ensure that an appropriate response/action is taken to concerns raised by parents.
- Give parents and carers enough information to be able to protect their children.
- Enable and empower parents (eg let them know what type of information to record about suspects and how to pass this on).
- Explain processes to parents, what will happen in meetings, who will be present, what outcomes may ensue. Avoid jargon and explain acronyms.
- Manage parents' expectations in relation to police investigations (eg duration of investigations, length of time seized items are retained, sentencing).
- Be mindful when organising the logistics of meetings – in terms of time scheduled (thinking of parents' and carers' need to balance work and contributions to the safeguarding process) transportation to and from meetings, who needs to be present in meetings etc.
- Refer to the Centre of Expertise Infographic on providing support for parents and carers in relation to all of the identified areas and refer/signpost to appropriate types of support.
- Consider whether there are any barriers to prevent parents accessing support.
- Parents ideally should have an independent parent support worker.
- Responses to parents should be person-centred and trauma informed.
- Responses should be strengths-based.

ORGANISATIONS AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT PARENTS AND CARERS

NAME	REMIT	AREA SPECIFIC	WEBSITE
PACE	Child abuse –Support for parents, child sexual exploitation.	England and Wales National Helpline offering support	http://paceuk.info/
MOSAC	Child abuse –Support for parents, non abusing parents/carers.	National	http://www.mosac.org.uk/
Marie Collins Foundation	Child Abuse – Support for parents, families and children abused online.	National	https://www.mariecollinsfoundation.org.uk/mcf/what-we-do/working-with-children-and-families
BACP	British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.	National	https://www.bacp.co.uk/
NSPCC	Support for children and families (please contact for details).	Please contact to determine if support is offered in your area.	https://www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/services-for-children-and-families/
Barnardo's	Support for children and families (please contact for details).	Please contact to determine if support is offered in your area.	http://www.barnardos.org.uk
NAPAC	Supports survivors of childhood abuse, and supporters of survivors.	Please contact to determine if support is offered in your area.	https://napac.org.uk/

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS (OWN EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING)

ORGANISATION	TITLE	LINK	TYPE OF SUPPORT
PACE	Keeping It Together – A Parent’s Guide to Coping with Child Sexual Exploitation	http://paceuk.info/wp-content/uploads/Keeping-it-together-PDF.pdf	Child Sexual Abuse – Child Sexual Exploitation
PACE	Information and advice centre which contains 19 different resources, including for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living and coping with CSE • Handling disclosure Plus numerous additional topics	http://paceuk.info/for-parents/advice-centre/	Child Sexual Abuse – Child Sexual Exploitation

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS (TO SUPPORT AND PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN)

ORGANISATION	TITLE	LINK	TYPE OF SUPPORT
Safe and Sound	Parent Support Pack	http://safeandsoundgroup.org.uk/help-support/parents-carers/parent-support-pack/	Variety of information, advice
The Children's Society	Trauma and Young People – A Guide for Parents Carers and Professionals	https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/trauma-and-young-people-a-guide-for-parents-carers-and	Trauma
Victim Support	Interactive resource to help parents support their children including the Journey to Justice and Interactive Courtroom resource.	https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/young-victims-crime/support-parents/resources-support-your-child	General information and support about the judicial process and other useful links
PACE	The Relational Safeguarding Model	http://www.paceuk.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Relational-Safeguarding-Model-FINAL-PRINTED-May-2014.pdf	Child sexual abuse – Child sexual exploitation
Parents Protect Lucy Faithfull Foundation	An information and resources website which aims to raise awareness about child sexual abuse, answer questions and give adults the information, advice, support and facts, they need to help protect children.	https://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/home.htm	Information, advice, support and facts to help protect children
The Children's Society	Criminal Exploitation of Children Toolkit	https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/home	
The Children's Society	Online Safety Toolkit	https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/home	

ORGANISATION	TITLE	LINK	TYPE OF SUPPORT
Marie Collins	The Marie Collins Foundation is a UK charity enabling children who suffer sexual abuse and exploitation via the internet and mobile technologies to recover and live safe, fulfilling lives.	https://www.mariecollinsfoundation.org.uk/	Information, advice and support
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	https://www.nspcc.org.uk	Information, advice and support
Barnardo's	National children's charity	http://www.barnardos.org.uk	Information, advice and support
UK Safer Internet Centre	A partnership between Internet Watch Foundation, Childnet International and the South West Grid for Learning.	https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers/resources-parents-and-carers	Information, advice
NWG	Online: Onguard - A Resource for Parents	https://www.nwgnetwork.org/online-onguard-a-guide-for-parents/	Information, advice
NWG	For Parents (including Spot the Signs)	https://www.nwgnetwork.org/for-parents/	Information, advice
PACE	Information and advice centre which contains 19 different resources including for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living and Coping with CSE • Handling disclosure Plus numerous additional topics	http://paceuk.info/for-parents/advice-centre/	Information, advice, support

FOR PROFESSIONALS – RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO EVALUATE AND FACILITATE SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

ORGANISATION	TITLE	LINK	TYPE OF SUPPORT
The National Working Group (NWG)	NWG Benchmarking Tool for Working Alongside Parents	https://www.nwgnetwork.org/resources/	Child Abuse –Child Sexual Exploitation tool for services to examine how they work with parents
Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse	Infographic – Supporting Parents of Sexually Exploited Young People (for full report details see section entitled Research)	https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-publications/supporting-parents/supporting-parents-infographic/	Information
PACE	Professionals (including links to publications, training opportunities and consultation services)	http://paceuk.info/for-professionals/	Information, advice, support
DABS Directory	National Resource Sub Directory Parents and Partners (last updated 16 April 2017)	http://www.dabs.uk.com/uploads/images/DABS%20Directory%20and%20resources/05%20PARENTS%20&%20PARTNERS.pdf	A list of contacts across the UK (including for example counselling services, charities, rape crisis centres etc).
The Children’s Society	CSAE Prevention Website with a list of resources.	https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/home	

FOR PROFESSIONALS - ORGANISATIONS AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS IN THEIR WORK WITH PARENTS AND CARERS

ORGANISATION	TITLE	LINK	TYPE OF SUPPORT
NWG	Consultation on best practice, CSE Response team	https://www.nwgnetwork.org/	Child Sexual Abuse - Child Sexual Exploitation
PACE	Training and consultation	http://paceuk.info/for-parents/advice-centre/	Child Sexual Abuse - Child Sexual Exploitation

RESEARCH

<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-publications/supporting-parents/>

[http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/17211/2/BSCPoster_\(1\).pdf](http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/17211/2/BSCPoster_(1).pdf) Dr Pamela Davis
Northumbria University Preliminary Findings on the needs of and support for
families of child sexual abuse

http://www.barnardos.org.uk/health_impacts_of_child_sexual_exploitation.pdf

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/trauma-resource-leaflet.pdf>

<https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/tiredness-and-fatigue/Pages/lack-of-sleep-health-risks.aspx>

<http://safeandsoundgroup.org.uk/what-is-cse/the-impact-of-cse/>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-exploitation/who-is-affected/>

<https://academic.oup.com/bjsw/article/47/6/1686/4554330>

http://www.barnardos.org.uk/university_of_bedfordshire_FCASE_report.pdf

<https://www.nwgnetwork.org/tackling-child-sexual-exploitation-summary-recommendations/>

<http://paceuk.info/wp-content/uploads/Parents-Speak-Out-final.pdf>

<http://paceuk.info/wp-content/uploads/Empowering-Parents-UoB-Pace-Evaluation-2017.pdf>

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