1. Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is defined as an act that involves a child less than 16 years of age in any activity for the sexual gratification of another person, whether or not it is claimed that the child consented. A child or young person of either sex may be a victim. Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening (National Child Protection Guidance 2021)

2. Who is at risk?

Research tells us that 1 in 10 children experience CSA by the age of 16. Children and young people who live in conditions of neglect, have a disability, are cared for or live in households where drugs and alcohol is present are statistically more likely to be at risk of sexual harm. Experiencing child sexual abuse can have a long-lasting negative impact on a child's wellbeing that can reach into adulthood. Effects can include mental health issues – such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and low self-esteem.

3. Signs & Indicators

Children may not disclose abuse, and many experience feelings of shame or guilt, often believing the abuse is their fault. It is also important to recognise that children who are pre-verbal, non-verbal, have learning disabilities, or communicate in different ways may be unable to make a direct disclosure. For this reason, being alert to the signs and indicators of abuse is essential.

For this reason, being alert to the signs and indicators of abuse is essential. Professionals must remain open-minded and consider that sexual abuse may be a concern in any family they support. Sexual abuse does occur, and we must be willing to consider the possibility.

4.

- Nightmares or bedwetting
- Becoming withdrawn, emotionally flat, disinterested, or socially isolated
- Appearing fearful when around a particular person
- Using sexual language or showing sexualised behaviour that is unexpected for their age
- Sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy
- Increased hyperactivity, aggression, or sudden changes in behaviour
- Use of alcohol or drugs
- Absence from school or disengagement from learning

5. Communication Matters

When communicating with a child who may have experienced sexual abuse, it is essential to help them feel safe, comfortable, and understood. Children are more likely to talk when they feel noticed, listened to, and reassured by your responses to what they say or do.

Use communication that is appropriate to the child's age, level of understanding, and individual preferences. This is especially important for children with disabilities or for those whose preferred language is not English, as they may need additional support to express themselves.

6. Resources

- https://shorespace.org.uk/
- Lucy Faithfull Foundation - Preventing child sexual abuse
- Sexual abuse | Childline
- csacentre.org.uk

7. Respond

If you believe a child is in **immediate danger**, contact the **police on 999**.
Any disclosure of child sexual abuse must be referred to **Children's Social Work (CSC)** on **01467 537 111** (or **03456 08 12 06** outside normal office hours).

For more information visit aberdeenshirechildprotection.org.

Aberdeenshire Child Protection Committee