



Child Sexual Abuse Strategy 2025- 2027



Foreword

I am proud to introduce this Child Sexual Abuse Strategy developed by the Stockport Safeguarding Children's Partnership. This strategy represents a collective commitment to protecting children and young people from the devastating impact of sexual abuse, and to ensuring that our response is both effective and compassionate.

Child sexual abuse is a distressing and complex area of safeguarding that demands a coordinated multi-agency approach. It is our shared responsibility to ensure that children are listened to, believed, supported, and that those who pose a risk are identified and held to account.

We recognise that child sexual abuse can happen in many forms and settings, and that it often remains hidden. This strategy has a focus on child sexual abuse in the family environment but will cross reference with other forms of sexual harm to children, such as through child exploitation.

Our strategy sets out how we will work together across services, communities, and systems to identify and intervene early when child sexual abuse has occurred and have a child centred, whole family approach in our response. It places a strong emphasis on professional curiosity and skill to identify signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse and to have clear pathways of effective support to children and their families.

This document is not just a framework; it is a call to action. It challenges us to reflect, to learn, and to improve. It reminds us that safeguarding is not the responsibility of one person or one agency, but of all of us. Together, we can build a culture in Stockport where child sexual abuse is identified early and responded to robustly.

Thank you all for your continued dedication to protecting the most vulnerable members of our community.

Chris McLoughlin OBE
Executive Director People and Neighbourhoods
Director of Childrens Services
Chair of the Stockport Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive



Introduction

National Context

Child sexual abuse is more common than most people think, and far more children are sexually abused than are ever identified or responded to.

An estimated 500,000 children are sexually abused in England and Wales every year

This equates to 1 in 10 children under the age of 16

Karsna and Kelly, 2021

These figures apply to the general population, but we know that our most vulnerable children are disproportionately affected by child sexual abuse. For children who are in our care, children with a disability, children with mental health needs and those living in a household where neglect and/or domestic abuse, the figure of 1 in 10 is conservative and likely to be much higher.

Although child sexual abuse has been found to be as prevalent as other forms of child abuse (Office for National Statistics, 2020), it is far less frequently identified in needs assessments in England – and very few children have a child protection plan under the category of child sexual abuse (Kewley and Karsna, 2025).

In November 2024 the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel¹ published the results of a national review of the response to child sexual abuse in the family environment. The panel's report, [*"I Wanted Them All to Notice": Protecting Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment*](#), proposed a set of recommendations for the UK Government and for safeguarding partnerships to support an improved response to child sexual abuse.

It is essential that as a local safeguarding children partnership, we take a strategic approach to improve the early identification and response to child sexual abuse, and one that is centrally informed by the findings and recommendations of the National Panel. This strategy will support us to build a clear picture of local need, strengthen multi-agency working, and drive improvements that are informed by the voices of children, adult victims-survivors, families, and practitioners.

Local Context

In 2024/2025, 308 referrals were made to Stockport's Multi-Agency Safeguarding and Support Hub where the primary issue of concern was sexual abuse

Of these, 122 were assessments by a social worker

In the same year, five children had a child protection plan under the category of sexual abuse

The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse estimates that 2,640 children in Stockport as sexually abused every year (Data Insights Hub)

To read more about The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse and their Data Insights Hub please visit [Data Insights Hub](#)

Learning from recent review activity has highlighted the need to strengthen practice locally across the partnership.



What is child sexual abuse?

Working Together 2023 defines child sexual abuse as:

“(Sexual abuse) involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether 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”.

The **National Panel’s report 2024** provides the following definition:

“While there is no single agreed definition of child sexual abuse within the family environment, this is broadly understood as sexual abuse by a relative, for example, a parent, stepparent, sibling or grandparent, those closely linked to the family, such as a parent’s partner, or someone within the home environment with caring responsibilities, such as a foster carer. However, intrafamilial child sexual abuse often overlaps with other forms of sexual abuse. Most online child sexual abuse material is created at home, with research indicating that around half of those producing this type of online content are family members, often biological/adoptive parents, or stepparents.’

For the purposes of this strategy, we will take account of both definitions but being clear that the strategy is intended to address child sexual abuse within the family environment.



The Impact of Child Sexual Abuse

Victim-survivors of child sexual abuse can be impacted in a wide range of ways and the nature and extent of this varies between individuals and may change over time. Causality of impact can be difficult to establish definitively, especially when someone has experienced multiple forms of abuse, which is common - over half of adults in England and Wales who reported being sexually abused before the age of 16 years also experienced another type of abuse including physical, emotional, neglect and/or witnessing domestic abuse. Despite these complexities in measuring the impact of child sexual abuse, there are some clear patterns in the experiences of victim-survivors post abuse. These include but are not limited to:

Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

An adverse impact on mental health and wellbeing is regularly reported by victim-survivors, during both childhood and adulthood. Victim survivors experience anxiety disorders and depression; eating disorders; self-harm and sleep disruption and insomnia. Many studies have highlighted a link between self-blame and low self-esteem for victim-survivors. Feelings of guilt and shame can have a lasting impact on emotional wellbeing, and shame plays a key role in suicidality and suicidal ideation. In the longer term, victim-survivors of child sexual abuse may be diagnosed with psychiatric disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder and borderline personality disorder.

Physical Health

Immediate physical impacts of child sexual abuse may include injuries associated with penetrative abuse and sexually transmitted infections, as well as early-onset puberty for girls. Longer-term, the impact of child sexual abuse on victim-survivors' general physical health can include upper respiratory issues and gastrointestinal conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome. Victim-survivors may also suffer from chronic illnesses such as arthritis and cardiopulmonary symptoms and are at higher risk of obesity, particularly for women.

Sex and Sexual Functioning in Adolescence and Adulthood

'Traumatic sexualization' – the inappropriate development of sexuality, sexual feelings and attitudes – is commonly considered a specific impact of child sexual abuse. This can affect an individual's sense of sexual satisfaction and sexual actions. Problems with sexual desire and sexual arousal may become apparent for victim-survivors in adolescence and adulthood.

Relationships and Parenting

- Sexual abuse can affect children's psychosocial development and attachment across different relationships in both childhood and adulthood. In the long term, sexual abuse in childhood can adversely impact relationship stability and satisfaction. This can directly impact a child's ability to access services as they may struggle to build safe trusting relationships, including with professionals.
- An adult who has experienced child sexual abuse may also struggle to recognise signs of an unhealthy relationship in adulthood, increasing their vulnerability to sexual exploitation and domestic abuse.
- Victim survivors may experience difficulties with some aspects of parenting. These can include difficulties with attachment and establishing boundaries as well as being overly permissive as parents and/or using physical discipline.

Socioeconomic and educational impact

Child sexual abuse can have a negative impact on victim-survivors' educational attainment, although for some children, engagement with education can be a protective factor. In adulthood, child sexual abuse can be associated with unemployment, lower income and financial instability because of the catastrophic impact.

Shared Vision

The vision of the Stockport Safeguarding Children's Partnership is to create a community where child sexual abuse is identified early, and victims and their families receive a strong trauma-informed response. It is important to remember that children and adults can 'recover' from experiences of child sexual abuse and live happy and fulfilling lives with the right support in place.

Practice Principles

The Stockport Safeguarding Children's Partnership has an agreed set of practice principles informed by *Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2023*. The Partnership is committed to adopting these principles in all its work and this includes our approach to child sexual abuse.

Child centred approach

- Practitioners working with children should see and speak to the child, listen to what they say, observe their behaviour, take their views seriously.

Whole family culture

- Practitioners work in partnership with parents and carers as far as possible. Working collaboratively will mean parents and carers have the best chance of making changes.
- Practitioners approach families with empathy, respect, compassion, and creativity.

Flexible and responsive multi-agency working

- Protecting children from abuse, neglect and exploitation requires multi-agency join up and cooperation at all levels.
- Strong, effective multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are flexible and responsive to existing and emerging local need.

Strength based, trauma informed and intersectionality aware

- Practitioners use strength-based approaches, working with children, young people, their parents and carers.
- Practitioners work sensitively with parents, carers and children to identify and understand the impact of adversity and trauma in their lives.

A learning culture and data informed

- The SSCP promotes and embeds a learning culture that supports local services to become more reflective and implement changes to practice.
- The SSCP ensures the effective collection, sharing and analysis of data to enable early identification of new safeguarding risks

Feedback and co-production

- Practitioners value and seek the contributions, expertise and knowledge of children, parents, carers, family networks and local communities.

Our Commitment

In Stockport, we want to adopt a whole system, whole family approach to addressing child sexual abuse. We want to challenge the taboo and silence around this form of abuse and ensure that all practitioners who work with children have the right knowledge and skills to identify and intervene at the earliest opportunity; assess risk accurately and respond confidently to all those affected.

We want to improve the information provided to parents, carers and the wider public about child sexual abuse so that key adults have the advice and tools they need to identify risk and keep children safe.

We will:

- Plan a child sexual abuse week of action
- Promote relevant information in areas used by the public, such as GP surgeries and libraries.
- Maintain a repository of easily accessible learning resources on the partnership website.
- Promote the importance of positive and healthy relationships and help children to understand what to do if they are worried and how they can talk about sexual abuse.

We want everyone who comes into contact with children to be able to recognise when there is a risk of sexual harm within family environments. We want practitioners to be confident to put safeguarding measures in place in the absence of verbal disclosures, and to know how to respond to children and their families with curiosity, compassion, and skill.

We will:

- Undertake a multi-agency training needs assessment, to ensure that practitioners feel equipped with the right knowledge and skills. This will include achieving the best evidence joint training.
- Provide a strong training offer in relation to child sexual abuse. This will promote relationship-based practice that considers children's background and identity (including ethnicity, culture, sexuality and/or disability), and including any barriers to accessing help and support
- Ensure that training equips all practitioners, including foster carers, to feel confident in talking directly to children and families about concerns of sexual abuse.
- Adopt and promote the child sexual abuse Response Pathway - [Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway | CSA Centre](#)
- Promote and disseminate additional learning tools and resources to enhance practitioner knowledge.
- Promote the offer of support and advice available from the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)

We want to make sure that child sexual abuse is responded to consistently by all partners working together and sharing information.

We will:

- Introduce the use of multi-agency chronologies to all initial child protection conferences
- Promote the invitation of SARC to all relevant strategy discussions
- Complete a child sexual abuse “True to Us” exercise
- Undertake a multi-agency audit of children where sexual abuse is or has been a concern.
- Embed and monitor a multi-agency child sexual abuse dataset to help us to understand our local profile and to inform our practice approaches.
- Review how people who present a risk of sexual harm and who have contact with children are assessed and managed, with information about risk shared across agencies in a timely way. We will consider the evidence of a need for safeguarding partners and probation to work together to create single points of contact and create a local response.
- Hold a Neglect and Child Sexual Abuse Summit (planned March 2026)

We want to promote a whole family response to child sexual abuse, ensuring that there are clear and well understood pathways so that the right support is provided to the victims and those around them who have been affected by the abuse.

We will

- Develop a directory of services available to children and families affected by child sexual abuse
- Review the current support offer available to victims and survivors in Stockport to ensure that this is robust and fit for purpose.



Review and Governance

Measuring the impact of this strategy is critical to understanding what's working, identifying gaps, and making improvements over time. It also ensures accountability and helps maintain momentum across the partnership. Monitoring of progress against the action plan will be the responsibility of the Child Sexual Abuse Subgroup that reports to the SSCP Executive Board.

This strategy is not a static document. The SSCP will formally review the strategy to assess progress against strategic objectives, reflect on learning from audits, reviews and data, and respond to changes in the local or national landscape.

Resources

The CSA Centre publishes a wide range of practice guides to improve professionals' knowledge, skills and confidence in identifying and responding to child sexual abuse. They include:

- [*Communicating with Children*](#)
Aimed at *anyone* who works with children, this guide aims to help them communicate with children in a range of contexts – from when concerns of sexual abuse first arise to when a police investigation is ongoing or has concluded.
- [*Supporting Parents and Carers*](#)
A guide to understanding parents' initial reactions to the sexual abuse of their child, and providing a supportive response to them.
- [*Managing Risk and Trauma after Online Sexual Offending*](#)
Advice for social work practitioners assessing and supporting families where a parent is under police investigation for accessing child sexual abuse material.
- [*Sibling Sexual Behaviour*](#)
A guide to help professionals navigate key decisions at various stages when concerns about sexual behaviour involving siblings have arisen.
- [*Safety Planning in Education*](#)
Aimed principally at professionals in education settings, this guide also contains useful information for other practitioners working with children who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour.

The CSA's [*Supporting practice*](#) series of 12 short films builds on these resources, to give professionals the confidence to identify and respond to concerns of child sexual abuse.

All of the practice resources complement the CSA Centre's Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway.

Supervision and Team Meetings

Reflective supervision, whether centred on the children and families we work with or on our own beliefs, values and attitudes, can be invaluable. They help practitioners across the partnership remain focused, deepen their insight, and enhance their practice, enabling them to offer more thoughtful, consistent, and effective responses to child sexual abuse.

Designed for ‘practice supervisors’ in children’s social care, but also relevant to anyone who manages or supervises professionals in this field, the CSA guide [*Using Supervision and Team Meetings to Improve Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*](#) explains how these discussions can be facilitated within individual and group supervision sessions, and in team meetings.

It also explains how to use a range of CSA Centre publications – and particularly their ‘Key messages from research’ series, to provide an evidence base that will underpin reflection and discussion. As well as improving professionals’ practice, this can also help them to fulfil their continuing professional development requirements.

The guide recognises the need for professionals to be given the time and space to reflect on their work and develop evidence-informed practice. Something that this strategy aims to address.