

# Sibling Sexual Abuse Practitioner Briefing

[The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse](#) defines Sibling Sexual Abuse as **harmful sexual behaviour** or **activity** involving the **misuse of power** with a **victimising intent or outcome** between **children who self-identify as siblings** (including half siblings, step siblings, foster and adoptive siblings). This may involve **sexual behaviours within a family environment** over a prolonged period. Including **non-contact forms of sexual abuse** such as voyeurism or forcing a sibling to watch pornography and **contact forms** including penetrative sexual acts and sexual touching. Sibling Sexual Abuse is behaviour that causes **sexual, emotional and physical harm**. It includes **sexually abusive behaviour** which can involve **violence**. **Sibling Sexual Abuse** is the most common type of child sexual abuse within the family home; however, it is the **least likely to be disclosed**. Sibling Sexual Abuse can occur in **all families** regardless of sexual orientation, disability, age, class or ethnicity.

## Prevalence:

- Sibling Sexual Abuse is estimated to be three to five times more common than parent to child sexual abuse.
- 15% of children/young people may engage in sexual behaviour with their siblings, and around 5% may be involved in sibling sexual abuse.

## Key Information:

- Sibling Sexual Abuse is more likely to occur when children have experienced abuse, neglect or have a convicted sex offender within their close network.
- A third of the children that display sexually harmful behaviours towards siblings have a learning disability.
- Do not rely on verbal disclosures. Consider behaviour that indicates something harmful may be happening such as using inappropriate language, playing with toys in a sexual way, not wanting to spend time with certain people.

## The Importance of Language.

Instead of using **language** such as 'perpetrator' and 'victim', it can be **helpful** to use language which reaffirms that we are **working to safeguard both children**. Terms such as '**child who has harmed**' and '**child who has been harmed**' can help everyone involved to **remember** both are **children, first** and foremost. **Avoid language that minimises the abuse or implies consent** for the child that has been harmed.

## How can practitioners recognise Sibling Sexual Abuse?

One of the **signs** that a child has been sexually abused can be that they **exhibit harmful sexual behaviour towards others**, including other children at school or in their family. Instead of focusing solely on the harmful behaviour, **consider whether the child has been sexually abused themselves**.

The **context of sibling sexual abuse** is complex and can include **trauma, isolation, viewing inappropriate images or videos, lack of sex and relationship education** and **additional/developmentally inappropriate caring responsibilities**.

**Children are more likely to come to the attention of services for secondary concerns** including self-harming or going missing. The sexual abuse may not be identified until later, when they develop trusting relationships with an adult.

It is important for practitioners to be aware of the signs and indicators to look out for.

Here are some resources [Practitioners Briefing on child sexual abuse](#), [NSPCC Understanding sexualised behaviour in children](#) and Hackett's sexualised behaviour continuum [Responding to children who display sexualised behaviour](#). [This is a useful guide for communicating with children that have or may have been sexually abused](#). For more information - [Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse](#)

## Barriers to disclosure

It can be **extremely difficult for any child** who has been sexually harmed **to tell anyone about the abuse**. **Not all children realise that they have been sexually abused**. It is **important for children to build a trusting relationship** with an adult so that they can tell them about their worries. They may show their **discomfort non-verbally** particularly if they have a disability or English is not their first language. Please **use professional interpreters if required** and not family members when discussing safeguarding information.

**It can be difficult for some parents or carers to acknowledge that sibling sexual abuse has occurred**. **Appropriate support and responses are required** for parents or carers to manage their feelings so they can focus on creating a safe environment for their children.

**Sibling Sexual Abuse is a Safeguarding concern** and impacts the whole family. Interventions need to be **provided to all children**, including those that have not been harmed and carers that have been affected. The professional network should **consider the family dynamics, relationships, daily functioning, lived experiences, attitudes, responses, roles and status of each family member**. Any **decisions should be proportionate** and communicated whilst **considering the emotional impact on the family**. Remember to **identify the areas of strength** within the family to **maintain hope that they can recover from the trauma**. **Reflective supervision** is important to challenge bias and consider culture and diversity.

## Safety Plans Should Consider:

- The **emotional needs** of the children, young people and adults.
- **Identifying the best practitioner for the child/young person to talk to**.
- Whether it is **realistic for the parents/carers to keep the children safe** (can they use the bathroom, go to sleep?).
- The **sexual and physical safety** of each child/young person in the household
- **Building on positive relationships**.
- **Sensitively sharing information** about risks within sibling relationships.

## What can help?

### Educate:

- **Talk about safe touch** - use resources like [NSPCC's PANTS](#) to support and reinforce this.
- **Ensure children know it is okay to seek help** if they need it.

### Be curious:

- I have noticed XXX and I wonder what is going on for you
- Tell me about...
- Help me understand...

Follow [Pan Bedfordshire Interagency Child Protection Procedures](#)

## What should practitioners do if they are concerned:

Speak to the safeguarding lead within their organisation.

If they are worried a child/young person has been sexually abused, contact the relevant children's services - **Bedford Borough Council** -

[Report a concern about a child](#) or **01234 718700**- **Central Bedfordshire Council** - [Refer a child to children's services](#) or **0300 300 8585** and **Luton Borough Council** - [Online referral for professionals](#) or **01582 547653**

Sexual Abuse is a crime, if a practitioner believes a child/young person is at immediate risk, then call the **999**.

Think about the therapeutic and emotional support for the children, young people and **carers regardless of the police investigation or outcomes**.