

Multi-Agency Response to children subject to Intra-familial sexual abuse.

Introduction

Barnsley Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) implemented a multi-agency audit in November 2025 focusing on children and young people who are victims or at risk of intra-familial sexual abuse.

Intrafamilial child sexual abuse refers to child sexual abuse that occurs within the family environment. Abuse may involve relatives or others who feel like family that are part of a child or young person's family network.

- **Multi-Agency Meetings:** Strategy meetings, panel meetings, and case conferences were seen as strength. When they occurred, they supported collaborative planning and escalation of concerns.
- **Specialist Input:** Agencies valued input from specialist services such as the Harmful Sexual Behaviour Hub, exploitation teams, and BSARCS. These contributions were pivotal in managing complex cases.
- **Training and Supervision:** Staff received supervision and reflective case discussions which supported professional development.
- **Direct Work with Children:** A child-centred approach was applied within direct work using creative tools and resources to help children understand safety and relationships.
- **Documentation:** Case file recording showed clear, detailed records of meetings, decisions, and actions.

Context

15 children/young people were selected for the audit who were victims of child sexual abuse in the family environment or were at risk of intrafamilial abuse.

The audit focused on the following key lines of enquiries (KLOE)

- Recognising sexual abuse
- Voice of the child
- Safety planning from a multi-agency perspective
- Multi-agency information sharing and collaborative working
- Agency understanding of sexual abuse

The multi-disciplinary audit involved agencies who were working with these children and young people including:



Child Sexual Abuse within the family environment is a priority for the BSCP and the audit findings and recommendations will be overseen within the Child Sexual Abuse subgroup.

Areas for Development

Recognition and Assessment

Early signs of Child Sexual Abuse and Harmful Sexual Behaviour were often missed or overlooked in assessments. Often focusing on other presenting issues and not fully exploring a child history or exploring patterns of abuse that showed risks building over time.

Family Context

Issues such as long-term neglect, domestic abuse, parents mental health difficulties and substance misuse were often found to be complicating factors within the family context. A more co-ordinated, family focused approach was needed to ensure the right support was in place for families.

Collaboration

Better communication, and collaboration with agencies was needed. The audit found some agencies were unclear around expectations, there were delays in arranging multi-agency meetings or getting specialist support, this slowed down how quickly concerns were recognised and acted upon.

Voice of the Child

The child's voice wasn't always fully reflected in assessments or plans and in some instances, records focused mainly on the adults' views.

Safety Planning, Intervention, and Outcomes

The quality and detail of safety plans varied especially when it came to risks within the family and the needs of siblings. More intervention and support from services could have been strengthened to improve the emotional health and wellbeing for children, reasons for this were due to waiting lists and limited resource provision in the area.

Professional Practice

Practitioner knowledge and confidence on responding to child sexual abuse varied across the audits. Not everyone escalated concerns or challenged decisions when they should, and escalation processes were not always used properly.

Overall Conclusion

- Specialist services such as BSARCS, the Harmful Sexual Behaviour Hub, and exploitation teams, showed evidence of positive work and outcomes for children and young people and were pivotal agencies in working with complex cases.
- There is a greater need for practitioners to recognise the signs of child sexual abuse and to stay professionally curious in their assessments and direct work, this means looking beyond the immediate reason for the referral and exploring the wider family context, family history, risks, and any ongoing concerns. Also to ensure all complicating factors are considered in the assessment and plan work of intervention.
- Some audits showed good multi-agency working, but there's still room to improve. We need clearer collaboration on what each agency is expected to do, better use of SMART action plans, more consistent information-sharing, and timely meetings so progress doesn't stall and the needs of the child can be met.
- Build staff confidence and awareness around child sexual abuse, including how to talk directly with children, how to respond to worries, and how to challenge concerns when needed. This will help ensure these issues are properly reflected in assessments, safety plans and direct work, and that concerns are escalated quickly when required.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen early identification and professional curiosity.
2. Improve consistency in multi-agency working and information sharing.
3. Ensure assessments are holistic and triangulate all available information.
4. Make the child's voice central to all planning and intervention.
5. Enhance the quality of safety plans ensuring that they reflect the family situation.
6. Address systemic barriers such as resource limitations and delays.
7. Invest in ongoing training, reflective practice, and confidence-building for practitioners around child sexual abuse.

Questions for Reflection

1. How can we make sure we are aware of early signs of child sexual abuse and improve our professional curiosity within our work with children and families?
2. How do we ensure that family context, including chronic neglect and other risk factors, is fully considered in all assessments and interventions?
3. What can we do to strengthen our multi-agency working and collaboration with partnering agencies to ensure there is no drift and delay to our work with children, young people and families?
4. Is our current training and supervision arrangements sufficient to build staff confidence, especially in challenging assumptions and reflective practice on child sexual abuse in family environments?
5. How confident are we in ensuring the voice of the child within our direct work, assessment and review process is captured consistently?

What to do now

1. Use the questions for reflection in your team meetings/ supervision or when being professionally curious about a young person or family you are working with.
2. Familiarise yourself with the additional resources and information.
3. Share the audit learning and the key messages with your team and colleagues and think about how as an organisation you can improve your practice.
4. Encourage staff to attend training to build knowledge and confidence.

Resources for Support

Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse, provide support for practitioners with resources to help improve knowledge, skills and confidence in identifying and responding to child sexual abuse. [Practice resources | CSA Centre \(www.csacentre.org.uk\)](https://www.csacentre.org.uk)

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel “ [I Wanted them all to Notice](#)” [Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment](#) Report, Published in November 2024

Barnsley Safeguarding Children Partnership Multi-Agency Training Programme offers training opportunities to help staff work with children and families when there are concerns around sexual abuse. There are a number of training courses and programmes available for all practitioners to attend.

For the dates and times of these training events and for the details of all other training offered, please follow this link:-

<https://barnsley.gov.uk/azurewebsites.net/services/children-families-and-education/safeguarding-families-in-barnsley/safeguarding-children-in-barnsley-for-professionals/multi-agency-training/training-and-events-calendar/>

If you have any further questions, or requests for additional resources or training please email us at

barnsleysafeguardingchildrenpartnership@barnsley.gov.uk. Please take a moment to complete our survey, your feedback really helps

us shape our work <https://forms.microsoft.com/e/Yp8eq0tbLy>.