

Guidance on Supporting Adults who disclose non recent (historical) child/young person sexual abuse

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1) **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank C who has bravely shared her experiences and supported the development of this guidance.

2) **Rationale**

This guidance has been developed as a result of a brave individual who shared her experience of sexual abuse as a young adult. Nationally there is a growing recognition of child sexual abuse and that it is not uncommon for individuals not to disclose until their adult years. The National Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse is underway and a number of high profile cases have reinforced the extent and long term impact of abuse in childhood/ adulthood.

It is very difficult for individuals to speak out about the abuse they have suffered and it takes courage to come forward and share their experiences. The response and support individuals receive is crucial and it is incumbent on agencies to ensure that staff are trained and demonstrate compassion and competence in knowing where to report and how to support an individual who makes a disclosure.

There is a large amount of literature on the negative consequences of untreated trauma of abuse. The impact of sexual abuse on mental health can be long term and profound particularly if people do not get a helpful response when they disclose.

3) **Principles applying to disclosures of non-recent (historical) sexual abuse**

- Historical allegations of abuse should be responded to in the same way as contemporary allegations
- Abuse can be reported regardless of how long ago it happened
- Abuse is never the fault of the victim
- Individuals who make allegations of non-recent abuse will be believed and supported to seek the help they wish
- It is important to consider whether the alleged offender could still pose a possible risk to children or vulnerable adults, if so safeguarding procedures should be followed
- The individual who made a disclosure should always be fully informed regarding the process
- The individual who made a disclosure should have one consistent staff member to support them

- Consideration should be given to whether the individual who made the disclosure wants a male or female supporter allocated and this should be facilitated wherever possible
- Support for individuals should be coordinated and independent support outside of the organisation where a concern is raised about a professional within it, should be incorporated into the package
- In all cases there should be multi agency consideration of the issues which will involve joint discussion and liaison between agencies.
- The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)/ People in Positions of Trust (PiPOT) Lead has a specific response to historical allegations against people who work or worked with children, young people/ vulnerable adults
- The individual who made the disclosure should have regular contact with the same person at intervals agreed with the individual

4) Definition of non-recent (Historical abuse) sexual abuse

An allegation of sexual abuse made by or on behalf of someone who is now 18 years or older, relating to an incident which took place in their childhood or early adult years.

Abuse will often involve the corruption of a trusting relationship through a process commonly termed as 'grooming'.

People may perpetrate abuse for many years and they can abuse the same victim or a number of victims over a period of time.

It is common for offenders to seek a position of trust either in their personal lives or through employment which allows them to gain access to children and young people.

5) Reasons why individuals may be reluctant to disclose their experiences of abuse

- Fear of not being believed
- Fear of being blamed by others for what has happened
- Feeling shame about what has happened to them
- Fear caused by threats
- Love or attachment to the person who abuse them
- Being in denial about what has happened or experiencing dissociation triggered by memories of abuse
- Feeling that they are the only person this has happened to
- Feeling scared that the family will break up as a result of disclosure
- Fear of racism
- Gender stereotyping

- Fear of exclusion from the community
- Fear they may lose their job, damage their career
- Fear of re victimisation
- Fear of court

6) Responses to a disclosure of non-recent sexual abuse

When an adult makes a disclosure to a professional that he/she has suffered abuse as a child/young person the professional to whom the disclosure is made should:

- Clarify whether there are any children/ young people or adults who may currently be at risk from the alleged perpetrator
- Ascertain whether the adult is aware of the alleged perpetrators recent or current whereabouts and any contact the alleged perpetrator may have with children/ young people/ adults
- Advise the adult to make a formal complaint to the police and offer the individual support in making the formal complaint to the police
- A referral can be made to children or adult social care and where it is believed that the alleged perpetrator has contact with children/ young people a referral to children's social care should be made. Equally if it is believed that the alleged perpetrator has contact with vulnerable adults then a referral to adult social care should be made.
- It is recognised that disclosure can be anxiety provoking for individuals, however feedback given by victims of abuse identify the reason for their disclosure is that they do not want others to suffer the same experiences as they did and are prepared to pass on information to protect others.
- In the circumstance where the adult does not wish to report to the police, but it is believed other children/ young people or vulnerable adults could be at risk, it should be explained to the individual the professional's duty to refer to social care to safeguard other individuals.
- The professional should record the discussion in detail
- If the individual wishes to remain anonymous, where possible this will be respected.
- The professional receiving the disclosure should liaise with the named safeguarding professional in their organisation for advice and guidance and to ensure a comprehensive package of support can be put into place

The two main referral points for receiving non recent allegations of abuse are the police and adult or children's social care services.

Upon receipt of an allegation of non-recent abuse it is important that agencies come together to consider the parameters of multi-agency support for the

individual alongside the criminal investigation. In order to facilitate this a historical abuse strategy/planning meeting will be called by either the police/ social care/ LADO/ PIPOT Lead.

Relevant agencies will be invited to participate in the historical abuse strategy/planning meeting through:

- Sharing all the relevant information
- Ensuring that all safeguarding checks and any resulting actions have been completed or are in the process of
- Ensure all appropriate support is in place for the victim
- Consider advocacy for the individual ensuring that it is informed through discussion with them
- Decide on how best to progress the case
- Consider if there are several unrelated children/ young people/vulnerable adults and/or more than one perpetrator and the Investigating Complex (organised or multiple) Abuse procedure should be followed
- Agree a plan for any further work
- Agree when the alleged perpetrator should be made aware of the allegation
- Consider if a referral needs to be made to a regulatory body
- Consider if a further meeting is required
- Arrange independent support for the individual e.g. DRASACS

7) **Conflicts of Interest**

It is recognised that there may be occasions where an individual receives or is made aware of a disclosure and there could be a conflict of interest due to a personal connection to the person whom is alleged to have perpetrated abuse. It is important that this is disclosed to a manager/ member of the safeguarding team immediately. Action can then be taken to remove the individual affected by the conflict of interest from further enquiries/ investigation/ support regarding the disclosure made.

8) **Timescales**

Disclosures of non-recent abuse where there are concerns about other potential victims should be reported to either the police or social care services within 1 working day

Timescales for action will follow the statutory guidance being applied e.g. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018, the Care Act 2014