

One minute guide

Learning from a Serious Case Review

March 2020

In early 2015 three children were removed from their home and placed in Foster Care as a result of significant neglect. Three months later one of the children disclosed that she had been sexually abused over a period of time by members of another family, some of whom were known to the child's mother.

A police investigation took place but was closed shortly afterwards with no further action. The children were subsequently made subject of Care Orders and remained in long term foster placement.

In 2016 the Police reopened the investigation and it was then that the case was identified as a major complex investigation into sexual abuse relating not only to these three children, but several others. Within the resulting criminal proceedings, several adults were sentenced to custodial sentences from 4 years to life imprisonment

Findings

- A shared feature of the children's lives was neglect. This created a clear opportunity for the perpetrators to groom and sexually abuse them.
- The identification of neglect had the effect of obscuring the sexual abuse, as practitioners felt that they had identified the concerns and did not look for further issues.
- All the families lived in an area of high socio-economic deprivation where poverty, neglect and disturbed behaviour in children was far from uncommon. Practitioners reflected that this made it difficult to identify which children were at greater risk.
- When small changes occurred in relation to the entrenched neglect these were too easily seen as an improvement, when the reality was that in the long term the change was not significant.
- Developing relationships with frightened or traumatised children requires time and a consistent, well supported worker.
- The abuse took place irrespective of gender, but where sexual behaviour occurred that would have raised concerns when in relation to girls, in relation to boys it was seen to be within the normal spectrum of male teenage behaviour.
- The parents were particularly effective at keeping professionals away. Parents were threatening at school and to Social Workers and one kept a large dog which at times was used to deter intervention.
- Perpetrators of sexual offending need to be in control in order to 'groom' their victims. The children were controlled with a range of methods such as direct threats e.g. killing the family pet, to manipulation of their existing vulnerabilities e.g. feeding a child who was hungry due to neglect.

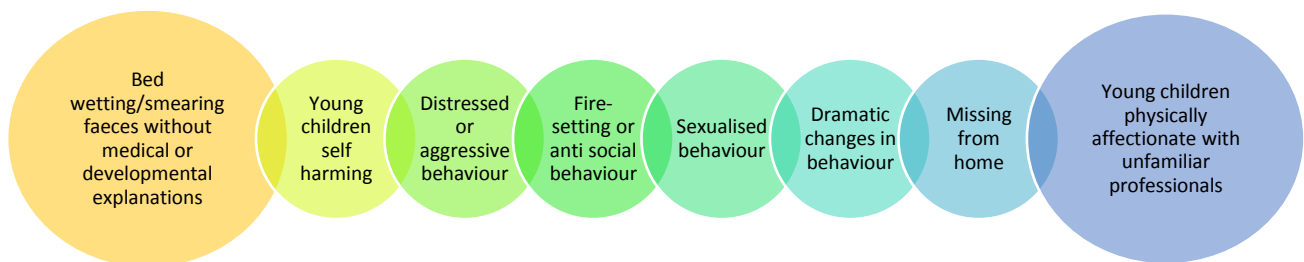
Responding to sexual abuse

Identifying sexual abuse in the absence of a disclosure is a challenge for professionals. It is estimated that only 1 in 8 children directly disclose they are being abused. Each of the children communicated their distress through their behaviour but despite this there was no evidence that sexual abuse was considered.

When children made partial disclosures, they did not result in clear enough recognition of what the child might be trying to say. Too often children were spoken to in the home using very direct questions. There was little evidence that children were spoken to using child friendly tools and methods that may have supported them to disclose.

Some practitioners reported a lack of confidence and skills in speaking to children about sexual activity and some were concerned about asking intentionally leading questions. When communication proves difficult specialist support or advice should always be considered.

Indicators of sexual abuse



Key Contacts and Further Information

Please find a copy of the full review here:

CSCP One Minute Guide – Grooming- <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/30443/grooming>

Sexual abuse within the family procedures- https://www.proceduresonline.com/covandwarksscb/p_cse_fam_environ.html

Working in the absence of a disclosure guidance- https://www.proceduresonline.com/covandwarksscb/p_indirect_disclosure.html?zoom_highlight=disclosure

Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership website - <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/lscb>

CSA resources-

https://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/206/coventry_safeguarding_children_partnership/3369/coventry_safeguarding_children