



# **Child Sexual Abuse Multi-Agency Strategy**

**2022 - 2025**

Agreed: 9 January 2023  
Launched: 14 March 2023  
Next Review: 14 March 2025

## **Why we need a Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) strategy**

There has been an understandable national and local focus in recent years on child sexual abuse outside of the family, through exploitation. While the term child sexual abuse (CSA) encompasses child sexual exploitation, this strategy is in respect of intrafamilial sexual abuse. This is sexual abuse that occurs within a family environment by a perpetrator who is a family member or family friend<sup>1</sup>. Around two-thirds of all CSA that is reported to the police is intrafamilial.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in 2017 stated the long-lasting negative impact of sexual abuse on a child's wellbeing that can reach into adulthood. This includes poorer physical and mental health, relationship difficulties, substance misuse, and risk of being the victim of further violence and abuse. CSA is rarely an isolated occurrence and may go on for many years.<sup>2</sup> The impact on the child can be less severe if the abuse is stopped, and the victim receives good support, and this is why professionals need to be aware of the extent of CSA and their responsibilities to identify and respond to this form of abuse.

It was recognised by the HSCP that a focus on intrafamilial CSA was required, following the publication of a Joint Agency Targeted Inspection (JATi) in February 2020 which had considered how professionals worked together in CSA cases in a national sample of local authority areas.<sup>3</sup> At the time, the HSCP said a look at intrafamilial CSA was 'well overdue'. This reflects the national picture. As a response to the JATi, the HSCP undertook a Child Sexual Abuse Multi-Agency Audit in October 2020, where the professional involvement with 10 children was considered in detail. At the time just five children were on a child protection plan in Hounslow due to risk of or actual sexual abuse, out of a total 231 children on a child protection plan.

The HSCP audit identified substantial learning for all partner agencies, in respect of the individual cases but also for the wider system. A learning briefing was compiled and shared across agencies<sup>4</sup> following the audit. The audit concluded that work was required to provide assurance to the HSCP that practice with children who have been or who are at risk of sexual abuse in Hounslow is good. There were strengths that can be built on and it was noted that there was a commitment to improving practice and learning more about this specific safeguarding issue. This strategy is part of the commitment to continue the required improvements.

In 2021 the Government published a national CSA strategy 'Tackling Child Sexual Abuse' which requires safeguarding partnerships ensure a whole-system approach to tackling child sexual abuse, and this strategy will ensure this happens.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes situations where someone is living within the same household as a child and assuming a position of trust or authority over that child through adoption, fostering, marriage or living together as partners.

<sup>2</sup> Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, UK.

<sup>3</sup> Multi-agency response to child sexual abuse in the family environment: joint targeted area inspections/JATI 4 Feb 2020

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hscb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/HSCP-Child-Sexual-Abuse-Multi-Agency-Learning-Briefing-2021.pdf>

It has been acknowledged nationally (and reinforced locally by the HSCB audit) that Covid-19 pandemic has 'created significant challenges for frontline services, and measures implemented to stop the spread of the virus have potentially increased the risk of child sexual abuse online and within the home'<sup>5</sup> There is therefore a need to ensure that this opportunity is taken to improve knowledge and practice in this area of safeguarding.

## **HSCP vision**

CSA is one of Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership's (HSCP) key priorities for 2022. The HSCP, linking to their strategic principles of Empowerment, Prevention and Proportionality, intend to show a commitment to improving and increasing the awareness, understanding, knowledge and skills of the professionals working with and supporting children in Hounslow who have experienced or are at risk of CSA. This strategic approach will focus on the need for effective and consistent practice around prevention, identification, investigation and assessment, and recovery.

It is important that all partner agencies of the HSCP support and are involved in this work. No single agency is able to respond effectively to child sexual abuse without the support and commitment of those within the wider partnership.

## **HSCP Priorities**

The priorities that this strategy will focus on over the next two years are:

- Full strategic and operational commitment from all organisations in the Borough.
- Improved awareness, understanding, and recognition of CSA
- An increase in the number of children identified as being at risk of or victims of CSA, with plans in place in respect of the risk
- An increase in the number of criminal convictions
- Timely and appropriate support to be in place for victims (this can be provided immediately, including when there is a criminal investigation.)
- Services available for perpetrators, including those under 18

## **HSCP Aims**

To have a workforce where all professionals working with children and families in Hounslow work together to safeguard children who are at risk of or the victims of CSA, by ensuring the following:

- Increasing awareness of CSA and ensuring that professionals 'Think the Unthinkable'

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<sup>5</sup> HM government's Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy 2021

- Understanding the physical, behavioural and emotional signs that indicate a child may have experienced CSA
- Increasing awareness of the behaviour of perpetrators
- Ensuring professional insight into grooming, including of professionals
- Understanding why children may not disclose and how their behaviour may indicate CSA
- An increase in the number of children being assessed and worked with due to CSA
- Recognising the lived experience of children and young people, and listening to and acting on their voice at all times, with an understanding of the complexities when needing to protect children who have been groomed
- Understanding of the links between CSA and other types of abuse, particularly neglect
- The specific awareness of recognising and responding to CSA perpetrated by children<sup>6</sup> and the need to ensure that both the alleged child perpetrator and victim need to be considered as children in their own right
- Communicate and share information promptly and effectively across agencies and with families as appropriate in cases of intrafamilial CSA
- Ensuring that interventions are supported by evidence so that they are effective and make a difference to the outcomes for children, young people and their families
- Each agency to have trained and knowledgeable individuals who can provide support and expertise in this area of safeguarding
- To increase the knowledge, expertise and confidence of professionals in schools, who are in a unique position to identify CSA
- Listening to people with lived experience of child sexual abuse
- The involvement of local voluntary sector organisations
- That consideration is given to the impact of this work on professionals

## **The Workforce**

To ensure improved outcomes, all organisations will commit to the following:

- Senior managers to lead by example by actively promoting the need to ensure that CSA is considered when required to improve outcomes for children who at risk of or are being sexually abused
- Practitioners receive good quality supervision and multi-agency training to support their work
- Ensuring that all professionals are knowledgeable about the nuances of this specific form of harm

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<sup>6</sup> Around one-third of child sexual abuse is thought to be carried out by under-18s.

- Developing a workforce that works together and as part of a multi-agency team when CSA is a risk or is suspected, ensuring that practitioners and managers are confident in recognising a concern and in the action that needs to be taken
- Everyone is mindful of diversity, and the additional vulnerabilities that mean that certain children and young people may be more vulnerable to this type of abuse<sup>7</sup>
- That professionals are aware of the learning identified in the IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse report 'People Don't Talk About It' - CSA in ethnic minority communities
- Ensuring that procedures are followed to ensure that strategy meetings, investigations and interventions of CSA are effective, evidence based and collectively owned
- That reconvened strategy meetings are being held in cases of CSA to consider the results of all child protection investigations, including medicals, ABE interviews, and significant updates in a criminal investigation, which should be attended by all of the professionals involved and chaired by a professional with suitable experience and objectivity
- The importance of professionals building relationships with children who are at risk of or may be a victim of domestic abuse
- That the procedures for organised and complex abuse are used in families where there are concerns about the risk of sexual abuse across different parts of an extended family and across generations

### **Governance Arrangements**

A CSA Task and Finish Group will be set up, to be chaired by a senior leader from Children's Social Care and supported by multi-agency partners who advise and champion the work to tackle intrafamilial child sexual abuse. The group will report to the Safeguarding Effectiveness Sub-Group, who have operational oversight of each of the HSCP's priority areas. Regular progress reports will be shared with the Partnership Board and Executive Group over the lifespan of this strategy.

### **How will success be measured?**

We will measure the success of our strategy, work and interventions by:

- Undertaking repeat CSA themed single and multi-agency audit and quality assurance work which shows the impact of learning briefings, training, supervision, professional challenge and improved practice across agencies
- Monitor data and analysis on the percentage of referrals to Children's Social Care for intrafamilial CSA and those cases that progress to statutory assessment
- Monitor the provision of services for children who have experienced CSA and programmes to work with perpetrators, to include evidence of effectiveness and outcomes

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<sup>7</sup> This includes disabled children and those who have been the subject of other types of abuse

- Gathering feedback from parents and children who have engaged with services because of CSA
- An increase in the identification of risk of CSA, with more children on a Child Protection Plan under this category
- An increase in the number of alleged perpetrators being investigated, prosecuted, and convicted of sexual offences
- This CSA Strategy will be reviewed on a two-yearly basis by the HSCP. The action plans and implementation plans, that are part of the HSCP Business Plan, will be monitored at every meeting until completion, ensuring that any delay in progress is identified and actioned quickly.

## References

Protecting children from harm | Children's Commissioner for England  
([childrenscommissioner.gov.uk](http://childrenscommissioner.gov.uk))

Multi-agency response to child sexual abuse in the family environment joint targeted area inspections (JTAs) ([publishing.service.gov.uk](http://publishing.service.gov.uk))

Child sexual abuse: learning from case reviews | NSPCC Learning

“People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

‘Victim and Survivor Voices from the Truth Project’ | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/our-research/the-scale-and-nature-of-csa/measuring-the-scale-and-nature-of-csa/>

Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy, HM Government, 2021

## Resources

Home - CSA Centre

Making Noise: Children’s Voices for Positive Change after Sexual Abuse - The International Centre: Researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking |University of Bedfordshire ([beds.ac.uk](http://beds.ac.uk))

Talk PANTS & Join Pantosaurus - The Underwear Rule | NSPCC

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation CSA resources and toolkits