Swindon Safeguarding Partnership

Child Sexual Abuse Strategy 2026-2029



Introduction

This Child Sexual Abuse strategy has been developed in collaboration with Swindon Safeguarding Partnership member agencies to provide families, communities, professionals and decision makers with an understanding of Child Sexual Abuse and the reason why a Child Sexual Abuse strategy is needed.

It is a multi-agency strategy for ***preventing, identifying,*** and ***responding*** to Child Sexual Abuse. Partner agencies need to be accountable for their performance and quality of interventions regarding Child Sexual Abuse.

Its focus is to prevent children from experiencing Child Sexual Abuse, to improve identification of Child Sexual Abuse and to intervene at the earliest possible stage to tackle its causes and reduce the impact on children when it happens.

This strategy aligns with the strategic vision set out in Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Strategy for 2026-2029.



Defining Child Sexual Abuse

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 defines sexual abuse as behaviour which:

'Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.'

The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse.

- Sexual abuse can take place online; technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse
- Sexual abuse can take place within the family environment and outside of the home
- Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children
- Sexual abuse often occurs in conjunction with the other categories of child abuse, especially emotional abuse, to maintain control and secrecy

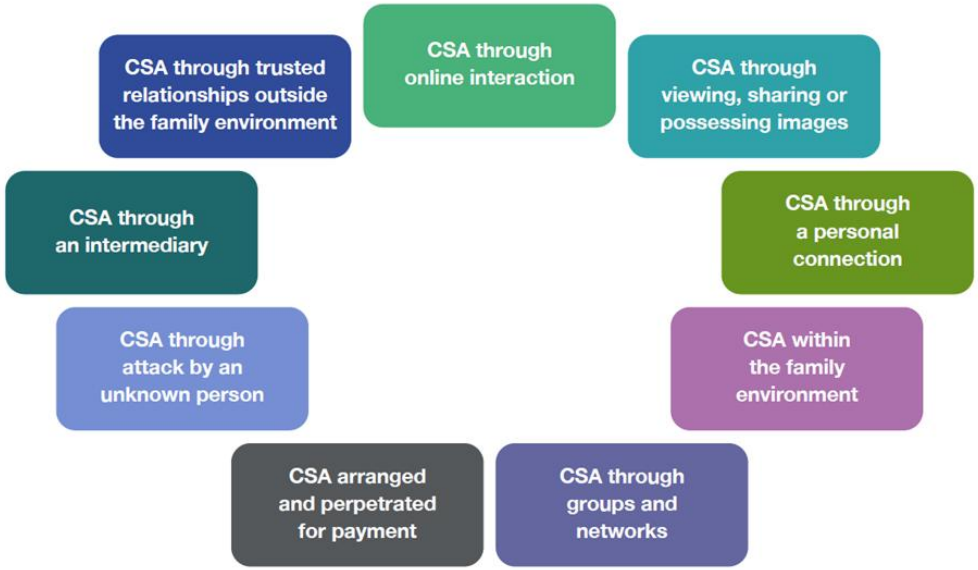


Child Sexual Abuse Centre of Expertise Typology of Sexual Abuse Offending

The Child Sexual Abuse Centre of expertise have developed A new typology of Child Sexual Abuse offending which outlines types of offending behaviour by adults.

It's also essential to appreciate the crossovers between these different contexts to avoid a siloed approach to Child Sexual Abuse. For example, researc studies have found that:

- almost half of children at high risk of sexual exploitation had already experienced Child Sexual Abuse (including rape), inside or outside the family environment, before the age of 16 (Hallett et al, 2019)
- around half of Child Sexual Abuse images/videos posted online had been filmed in familial settings (Salter et al, 2021).



Who is at Risk?

All children regardless of gender and age are at risk of being sexually abused. Sexual abuse can be the most secretive and difficult type of abuse for children to report. It may be particularly difficult to report abuse by a sibling.

Many children do not recognise themselves as victims of sexual abuse; a child may not understand what is happening and may not even understand that it is wrong especially as the perpetrator will seek to reduce the risk of a child reporting the abuse by threatening them, telling them they will not be believed or holding them responsible for their own abuse.

There may be a range of signs, but any one sign does not necessarily mean that a child is being sexually Signs and indicators of child sexual abuse | CSA Centre.

Children who are sexually abused online could be abused by someone they know or groomed by a stranger.



Swindon's Shared Vision

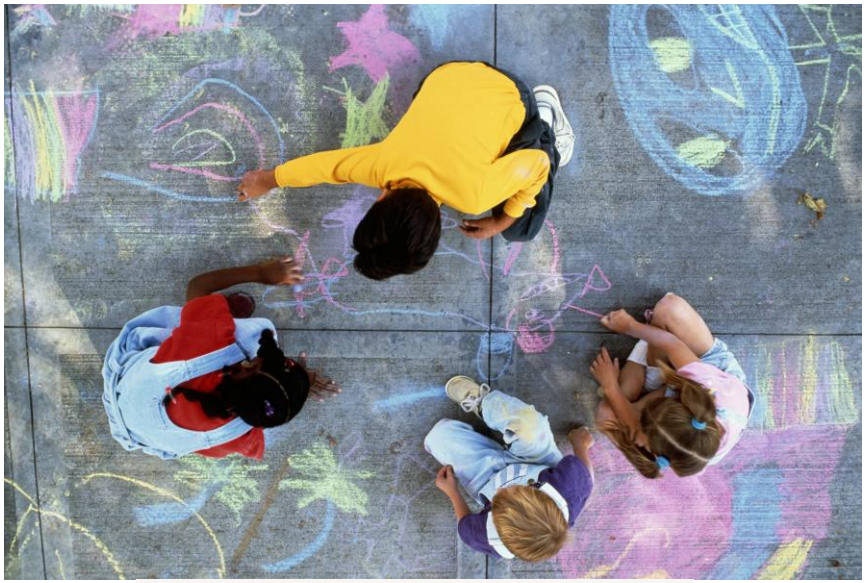
We will work together with partners to prevent and to minimise the impact of Child Sexual Abuse on children in Swindon.

We want all professionals to feel enabled to confidently identify, assess and respond to Child Sexual Abuse.

We will achieve this through

- ✓ Our commitment to create environments where children feel empowered to speak, where their voices expressed through words, behaviours, and emotions are actively listened to, understood, and acted upon.
- ✓ Ensuring that all professionals are equipped to recognise the signs of sexual abuse, including subtle behavioural indicators, and respond with compassion, urgency, and effectiveness. Through robust preventative measures, education, and multi-agency collaboration, we aim to reduce the risk of sexual abuse, promote resilience, and uphold the rights and dignity of every child.

Child Sexual Abuse Practice Guidance



It is the obligation of every person born in a safer room to open the door when someone in danger knocks.

— Din Nayeri

Purpose of the Strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that Swindon Safeguarding Partnership collaborate with agencies working in Swindon to demonstrate their commitment to **preventing, identifying and responding to Child Sexual Abuse**. Swindon Safeguarding Partnership want all professionals to feel enabled to confidently identify, assess and respond to Child Sexual Abuse.





Governance

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Executive Group has agreed that Child Sexual Abuse is a strategic priority. We recognise the significant impact that sexual abuse has on children and are committed to improving our response to preventing, identifying and responding to Child Sexual Abuse.

A Child Sexual Abuse Strategic Group has been established to oversee the actions identified in this strategy via a Child Sexual Abuse Group work programme. The Chair of the Child Sexual Abuse Group will report to the Safeguarding Partnership Delivery Group and to Safeguarding Partnership Executive Group on the progress to ensure that all partner agencies contribute to the implementation of the strategy and hold each other to account.

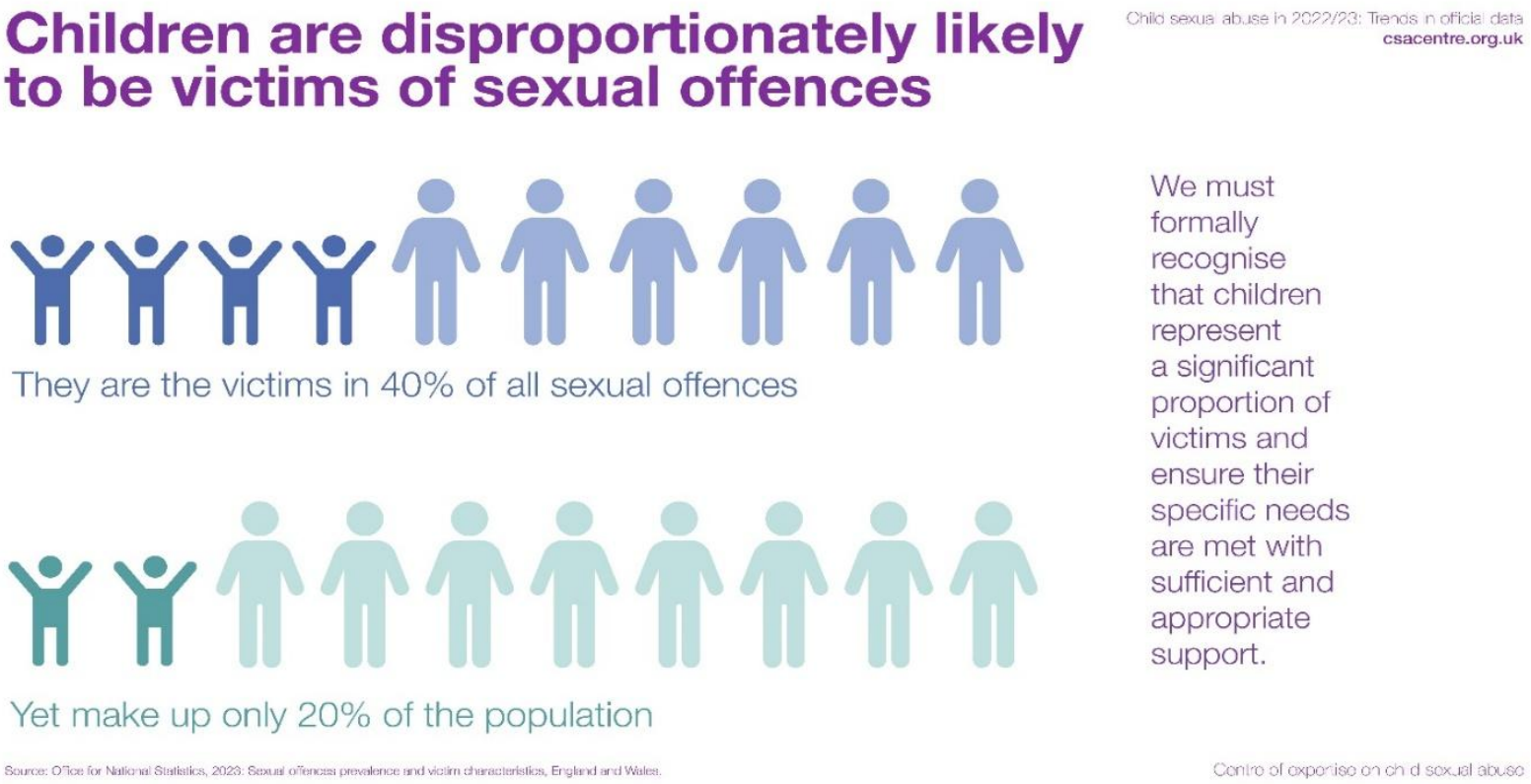
Key Legislation and Guidance that Underpins this Strategy

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations
- Keeping Children Safe in Education
- National Panel Report ‘I wanted them all to notice’ (2024)
- DfE Tackling-child-sexual-abuse-progress-update (2025)
- Casey Report JTAI prevention section (2025)
- Crime and Policing Bill: Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse recommendations (February 2026)



National Context

National data suggests that Child Sexual Abuse is just as common as other forms of childhood harm including emotional and physical abuse, but it is much less likely to be identified by safeguarding professionals. It is estimated that 1 in 10 children will experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16 in England and Wales.



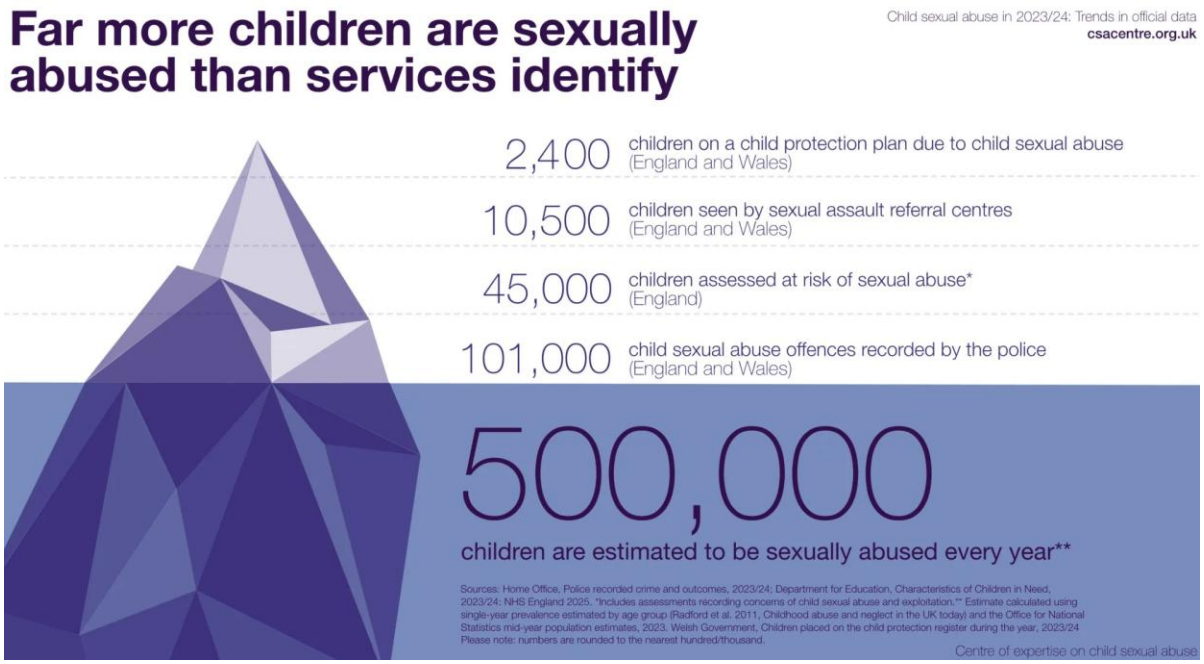
National Context



It has been estimated that 500,000 children were sexually abused in the UK in 2019. 15% of girls and 5% of boys experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16. It is estimated by the National Crime Agency that between 350,000 - 850,000 individuals in the UK pose a sexual threat to children. Most children struggle to report this abuse, with most reports coming years after the abuse, if at all. This can lead to unresolved trauma and impacts including severe physical and mental health difficulties, low educational attainment, and reduced life opportunities.

As well as this social cost, the annual cost to the UK economy of Child Sexual Abuse is calculated at £3.2 billion. Families, communities, and professionals find the system difficult to navigate and services hard to access. More work is needed to understand the best way to prevent Child Sexual Abuse and how this should be tailored to different contexts, individuals and environments in each community. There are very few services focused on prevention.

National Data tells us that more children experience Child Sexual Abuse than services are currently aware of. The diagram below shows the scale of Child Sexual Abuse compared with agencies identification of it, evidencing that we are only identifying “The tip of the Iceberg” when it comes to Child Sexual Abuse.



Child Sexual Abuse: NSPCC briefing published in January 2025 suggests:

- Concerns around sexual abuse have been identified for over 2,400 children in the UK who are the subject of a child protection plan or on a child protection register.
- Over a third of all police-recorded sexual offences are against children.
- Girls and older children are more likely to experience sexual abuse.
- The vast majority of children who experience contact sexual abuse were abused by someone they knew.

Further information about the available data and statistics about Child Sexual Abuse can be found in the briefing Statistics on Child Sexual Abuse | NSPCC Learning

Local Context

The national picture is reflected in the local picture in Swindon as identified in the “tip of the iceberg” diagram.



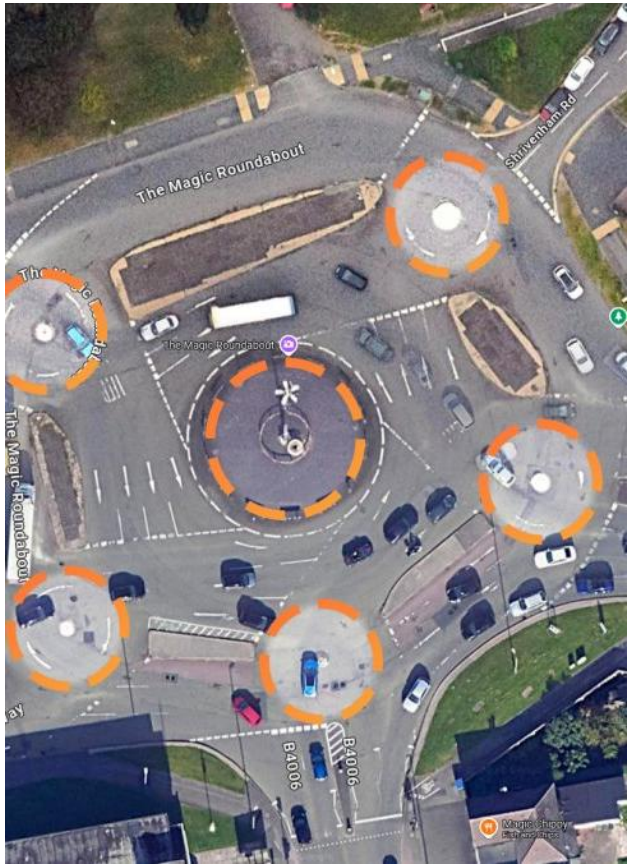
Local Context

The need for the development of a Child Sexual Abuse strategy was identified by Swindon Safeguarding Partnership as a priority. This was due to the lack of a current strategy and identified gaps across the Partnership in data, training, learning from local and national safeguarding reviews and learning from local multi-agency audits.

The strategy has been developed considering local data compared with national data of Child Sexual Abuse, as only by knowing the nature and scale of the problem locally can all partners work together to address and prevent all types of Child Sexual Abuse.

In considering the local data we have concluded that the data we hold needs to be strengthened. The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse suggests that the core data set should include data on the person experiencing sexual harm, the suspected person causing the sexual harm, the context of the abuse, and the service response.

Therefore, to understand Child Sexual Abuse, we need to strengthen our partnership approach to consistently collect, review, and use relevant data. Swindon Safeguarding Partnership has established a core data set which will be used to inform the Child Sexual Abuse strategic work programme that sits under the strategy. This data will help us to understand the prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse across Swindon, identify gaps in service provision and will support all partners to increase preventative activity.



Learning from National and Local Safeguarding Reviews

In November 2024, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published its report 'I wanted them all to notice' child-sexual-abuse-within-the-family-environment which investigated the experiences of children who were sexually abused by a family member. It explores the challenges in identifying, assessing and responding to Child Sexual Abuse within the family environment.

The findings and recommendations included:

- the importance of speaking to and listening to children
- the need to understand parents' vulnerabilities and challenges
- the need for robust risk assessments
- how to effectively respond to concerns of intrafamilial sexual abuse

The report recommended that all safeguarding partnerships should "develop a local action plan to respond to its recommendations as it affects local multi-agency practice," to help overcome local strategic challenges in identifying and responding to this abuse.

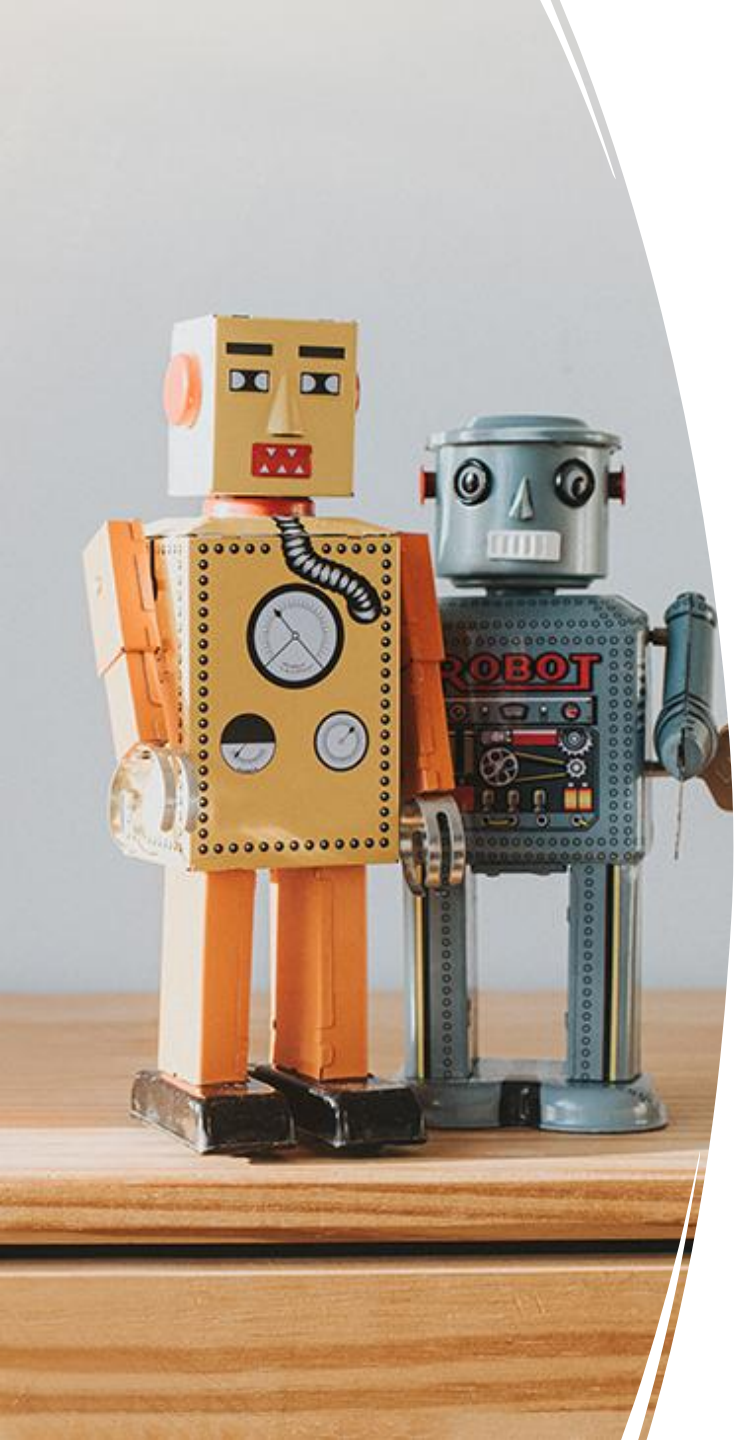
National learning from the NSPCC has highlighted that harmful sexual behaviour should be recognised as a potential indicator of abuse and that sometimes this can be challenging for professionals to recognise and respond Harmful sexual behaviour: learning from case reviews

In Swindon, Rapid Reviews recently undertaken have identified that we are not responding robustly enough to children who have reported sexual abuse.

We have strengthened our response to children who are displaying Harmful Sexual Behaviour with an updated Harmful_sexual_behaviour_protocol

Child sexual exploitation is a form of Child Sexual Abuse and children can be sexually exploited within gangs, individually or online. More information can be found at:

Child exploitation - Harm outside the home - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership



Prevention and Disruption of Child Sexual Abuse

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership seeks to prevent all types of Child Sexual Abuse including intra-familial abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, child sexual exploitation and online abuse by working in partnership with children and families, communities, professionals and systems through the delivery of this strategy.

By working together and sharing information we plan to develop an inclusive, strength based, sustainable and evidence-based approach to preventing Child Sexual Abuse. The approach will also be informed by data and an understanding of trauma and its impact. The local response will be informed by the Government strategy “Tackling Child Sexual Abuse” whose ambition to strengthen the response to all forms of Child Sexual Abuse through three key objectives:

1. Tackling all forms of Child Sexual Abuse and bringing offenders to justice.

2. Preventing offending and reoffending.

3. Protecting and safeguarding children and supporting all victims and survivors.

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Child Sexual Abuse Strategy

We Will Ensure

- ✓ Children are kept safe from sexual abuse because Swindon is following a clear, systematic , multi-agency strategic approach to responding to Child Sexual Abuse.
- ✓ The Safeguarding Partnership understands the prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse in Swindon through gathering and analysis of data and provides the relevant response/services.
- ✓ The Swindon safeguarding workforce is skilled, prepared, well trained and works effectively with others to reduce Child Sexual Abuse.
- ✓ Children and families know where to access support/services if they are concerned about Child Sexual Abuse and there is a good local offer for children receiving from Child Sexual Abuse.
- ✓ Children and families know when and how to act if they are concerned about Child Sexual Abuse.
- ✓ Data informs us that the community and professionals are more aware of Child Sexual Abuse.
- ✓ Data informs us that children and families feel safer, have timely interventions, and have appropriate and adequate support.

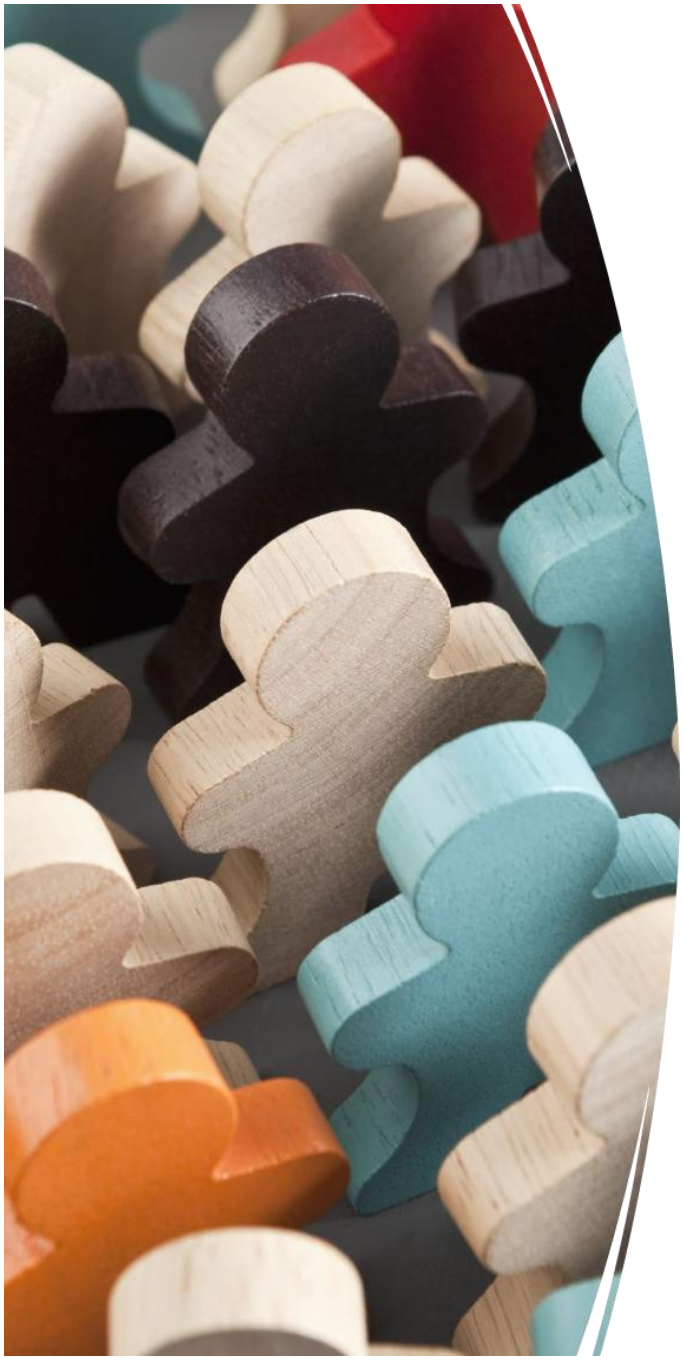


Community

- ✓ We will, through public campaigns and education build a community which are more aware and curious about Child Sexual Abuse and how to take actions to prevent Child Sexual Abuse.
- ✓ We will help the community to have access to information and training and support their understanding of healthy sexual development and how to promote this.
- ✓ We will work with communities to understand and respond to places which are associated with Child Sexual Abuse.

Children and Families

- ✓ We will ensure that the child's and family's voices and lived experiences are understood, heard, and responded to in a sensitive and supportive way.
- ✓ We will help children and families to have access to information and training and support their understanding of healthy sexual development and how to promote this .
- ✓ We will work with schools to ensure that children learn about identifying safe and unsafe behaviours.
- ✓ We will recognise the impact on families affected by Child Sexual Abuse and their need for information and support at the earliest opportunity. We will guide families to the relevant information and support.
- ✓ We will ensure that children receive appropriate health support



Professionals

- ✓ We will ensure practitioners are more able to recognise the potential signs and indicators of Child Sexual Abuse and are more confident and able to ask/talk to children and parents about Child Sexual Abuse.
- ✓ We will through public campaigns improve community recognition of Child Sexual Abuse recognise Child Sexual Abuse in families, education, and community, across all levels of the thresholds of need and there is a clear application of threshold.
- ✓ We will ensure that our threshold document is clear about the response to Child Sexual Abuse across the continuum of need and is consistently applied.
- ✓ We will ensure that practitioners follow the appropriate pathways for support and assessment of Child Sexual Abuse.
- ✓ We will support our workforce in learning about healthy relationships, appropriate childhood development and being curious when seeing vulnerabilities in children.
- ✓ We will encourage our workforce to be curious when observing or assessing signs of sexually harmful behaviour in children to help them identify behaviour which may require additional support.
- ✓ We will introduce the workforce and the community to understand the different types of Child Sexual Abuse, to adequately assess and intervene and seek support for children and families.
- ✓ We will develop the multiagency workforce understanding of Child Sexual Abuse by understanding their professional development requirements and make training opportunities available to the workforce.





How We Will Evidence Impact

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership have produced Outcomes Based Accountability scorecards to use measures and indicators to chart progress against outcomes for children in relation to Child Sexual Abuse, these measures are also aligned with the Safeguarding Partnership's Strategic Business Plan. **See Appendix 1 for scorecard.**

- ✓ There will be a measurable increase in the number of referrals into Children and Families Contact Swindon with Child Sexual Abuse as a referral reason, demonstrated through audit and data.
- ✓ There will be a reported increase in practitioner confidence around the early identification, assessment and response to Child Sexual Abuse, demonstrated through training feedback and questionnaires.
- ✓ There will be an increase in take up of 'Developing an Understanding of Child Sexual Abuse' training across the Partnership.
- ✓ There will be an increase in professionals accessing the Child Sexual Abuse toolkit on the Safeguarding Partnership website. There will be positive feedback from children and families on their experiences of working with us.
- ✓ There will be an increase in children accessing evidenced based support services when they have reported sexual abuse.
- ✓ There will be evidence at every strategy discussion where Child Sexual Abuse is a concern that a holistic medical assessment has been considered.

When We Get it Right

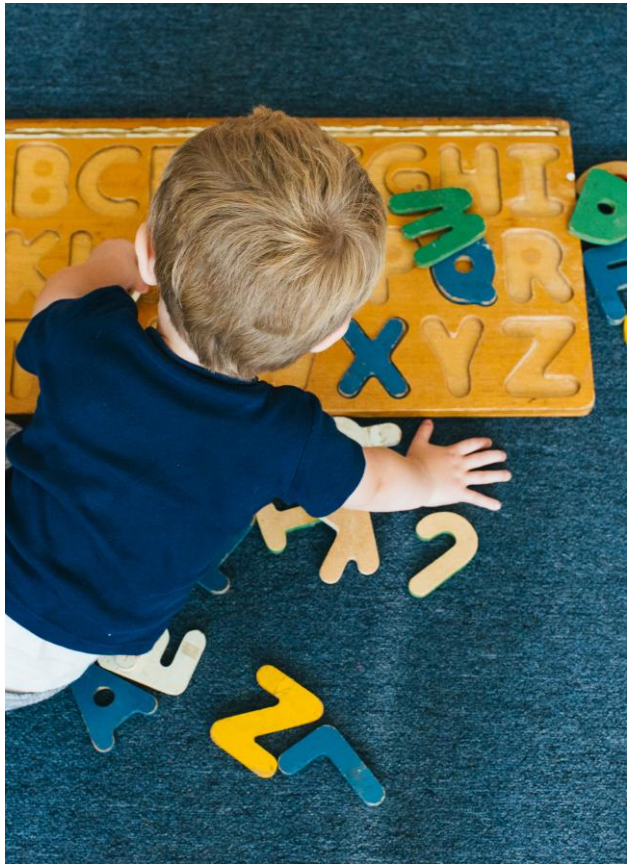
- ✓ Professionals will know the child's story and understand what this means for the child.
- ✓ Children will feel loved and safe at home.
- ✓ Children will have caring parents/carers and a supportive network.
- ✓ Children will be protected from those who cause them harm.
- ✓ Children will be given the opportunity to grow and develop well.



Swindon Safeguarding Partnership
Child Sexual Abuse Practice Guidance

The Child Sexual Abuse Practice Guidance provides information for all agencies working with children and families who have been impacted by Child Sexual Abuse and includes information and guidance for children and families, communities and professionals.

Child Sexual Abuse Practice Guidance



Monitoring and Evaluation

This Strategy aligns to the Swindon Safeguarding Partnership overarching strategy and strategic action plan.This sets out actions and outcomes relating to Child Sexual Abuse and these actions will be monitored by the Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Child Sexual Abuse Strategic Group.

This Strategy will be reviewed in 2029.



Appendix 1

Outcome Based Accountability Scorecard

Priority 1: Child Sexual Abuse

What do we want for children?
We want to work together with partners to prevent and minimise the negative impact of child sexual abuse on children and young people in Swindon. All professionals will feel enabled to confidently identify, assess and respond to child sexual abuse

We'll know when

All agencies:
1. Operate within the Right Help at the Right Time framework to safeguard and promote the health and wellbeing of children and young people to ensure decision making relating to CSA is in line with local thresholds for children
2. Follow CSA pathways and practice guidance for assessment and support for children

Practitioners know how to:
1. Identify concerns relating to CSA
2. Respond appropriately to children and families where CSA has been identified
3. Support children and their families where CSA has been identified via various pathways

We:
1. Treat families as our partners and give importance to what they say
2. Are honest and transparent
3. Build on strengths as well as identifying difficulties
4. Communicate clearly regarding concerns and what needs to happen to reduce those concerns
5. Recognise the importance of a child's family and community
6. Understand the child and family's individuality, beliefs, culture, and spirituality
7.Provide information to children and families regarding support and advice available to them

Child's voice

1. I feel loved & in a stable environment
2. I am growing & developing well
3. I have caring parents & a supportive network
4. I feel warm & well fed
5. I know I am safe & where I am with my parents/carers
6. Professionals know my story and understand what this means for me

What will make a difference

1. Understanding the intersectionality of Child Sexual Abuse, Domestic Abuse and Neglect.
2. Consistent thresholds of risk posed by individuals
3. Identifying and responding to places associated with CSA
4. Children have access to appropriate holistic medical assessments
5. A choice of Interventions to support families where CSA has been identified whilst they are waiting for access to specialist services including stabilising and counselling support
6. Alternatives for specialist interventions
7. Family focused responses
8. Greater collaborative working between partners:
9. Improving information sharing about risk factors in the family and child's environment
10. Clear planning and decision making when a child is open to more than one service
11. Prevention and disruption activity
12. PHSE input to children is clear about CSA and safe and unsafe relationships

Why does it matter in the context of safeguarding children?

1. Experiencing sexual abuse in childhood can have a long-lasting negative impact on a child's wellbeing that can reach into adulthood

Most critical underlying issue/s we need to address to break the cycle?

1. There is a lack of understanding with practitioners around child sexual abuse
2. We need to ask children and not rely on them to tell us
3. Assessments should be multi-agency and multi-disciplinary, drawing on relevant expertise
4. Assessments should also focus on the adult about whom concerns have been raised
5. Children who report sexual abuse receive the right help at the right time and are not closed to services when police take no further action
6. When perpetrators are known they are prevented from causing further harm

We need solutions for

1. Increasing confidence in practitioners and managers in understanding and responding to child sexual abuse

What will we do to improve practice & practice knowledge?

1. Raise awareness of evidence-based approaches that are focused on what works for children and families and support practitioners to reflect on how to put this into practice
2. Ensure that practitioners/managers complete partnership training on Developing an Understanding of Child Sexual Abuse
3. Create an online tool kit for practitioners/managers so that CSA resources and tools are easily accessible
4. Complete multi-agency audits that include the voice of children, families and practitioners to understand what has worked
5. Provide opportunities for practitioners to hear directly from children and families about what has worked
6. Hold a CSA practitioner forum to engage with frontline practitioners/managers to raise awareness and understand confidence levels
7. Promoting the use of the Child Sexual Offender Disclosure Scheme
8. Ensure that practitioners/managers are confident in identifying the signs of sexually harmful behaviour in children and young people, which may require additional support.

What will we do to improve public knowledge?

1. Develop an awareness campaign and agree how key messages can be delivered across multiple platforms and that shares children's and families lived experience about the impact of child sexual abuse
2. Use digital and social media platforms to disseminate information, resources and educational material about child sexual abuse in accessible, engaging formats
3. Promote the Stop it Now Campaign

Priority 1: Child Sexual Abuse

What do we want for children?

We want to work together with partners to minimise the negative impact of child sexual abuse on children and young people in Swindon
All professionals will feel enabled to confidently identify, assess and respond to child sexual abuse

We'll know when measures

1. Increase in the number and quality of referrals into Children and Families Contact Swindon with child sexual abuse as a referral reason (Dip sample)
2. Increase in the number of children open to EI services with criteria CSA (Reference 5.1.8)
3. Decrease in % of repeat CP plans for CSA (Reference 5.1.7)
4. Children are not sexually harming children (Reference 5.2.10 – 5.2.12)
5. Decrease in the number of reported sexual offences committed against children (Reference 5.2.1 – 5.2.14)
6. Decrease in the number of offences committed by under 18's (Reference 5.2.10, 5.2.12, 5.2.14)
7. % Increase in the number of children referred to CSA support services (NSPCC, Barnardos & FearFree) (Reference 5.4.1-5.4.3)
8. Increase in the number of strategy discussions where CSA is a concern that a holistic medical assessment has been considered

Child's voice measures

1. % of single agency audits which show:
2. voices of children captured in assessments
3. child's voice has been acted on not just heard
4. Feedback from children and young people from multi-agency audits (Reference 5.5.1 - 5.5.4)
5. Children are accessing evidence-based support at the earliest opportunity (Reference 5.4.1-5.4.3)
6. Feedback from children via Public Health surveys

Trend data to track underlying issue/s

1. Number of contacts with a contact reason of Child Sexual Abuse
2. Number of referrals with a contact reason of Child Sexual Abuse
3. Completed assessments in the period with an assessment factor of CSA
4. Category of CP Plan as at end of month – CSA
5. Number of children open to Family Workers where CSA is an involvement reason
6. Number of children open to Edge of Care service where CSA is an involvement reason

(Reference 5.1.1 – 5.1.9)

Making a difference measures

1. % Increase in the number of children referred to CSA support services (NSPCC, Barnardos & FearFree) (Reference 5.4.1-5.4.3)
2. Increase the number of children who are victims of modern slavery through sexual exploitation being referred to NRM (Reference 5.2.21)
3. Increase in non-recent CSA medicals (Reference 5.3.1 - 5.3.12)
4. Number of SHOPOs being placed on offenders against children (Reference 5.2.15 – 5.2.16)
5. Decrease in the number of sexual abuse perpetrators (Reference 5.2.17)
6. Increase in the number of child sexual abuse perpetrators referred to accredited programme Building Choices (Reference 5.2.19)
7. Increase in the % of perpetrators completing an accredited programme (Reference 5.2.20)

Underlying issue/s we need to 'deep dive' / consider in single & multi-agency audits

1. Understanding the intersectionality of Child Sexual Abuse, Domestic Abuse and Neglect. Number of audits where this has been considered

Improved practice & practice knowledge measures

1. An increase in the uptake of 'Developing an Understanding of Child Sexual Abuse' across the partnership (Reference 5.6.1)
2. An increase in partners accessing CSA toolkit on the SSP website (Reference 5.6.2)
3. Increase in the % of single agency referral audits that show referrals to be of good quality (Dip sample)
4. Increased in the % of multi-agency audits that show intervention has led to reduced risk (Reference 5.5.2)
5. Reported increase in confidence from practitioners around the early identification & assessment of child sexual abuse (Practitioner Questionnaires)
6. Increase in the number of people accessing the CSA Pathway on the SSP website
7. Increase in the number of people accessing the CSA toolkit on the SSP website
8. Increase in the number of people accessing the HSB protocol on the SSP website
9. Increase in the number of people accessing HSB training

Improved public knowledge

1. 1. Number of referrals relating to CSA into Children and Families Contact Swindon from the public increases (Dip sample)