

Background - The National published a review in Nov 2024. **"I wanted them all to notice"**, is about child sexual abuse within the family environment.

The voices and experiences of the 193 children at the heart of this review make very plain that too often we fail to notice and act to help and protect children from sexual abuse in their families.

In recent years, very necessary attention has been given to the sexual abuse of children in public institutions, by strangers on the internet and by 'high profile' individuals. The uncomfortable truth, that safeguarding professionals know well, is that very many children are sexually abused by someone they know well and in their own home. This review report seeks to shine a light on the many systemic and practice barriers to giving children the help & protection they need when they are abused within their families'.

Further Reading

Read the full review report here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-review-into-child-sexual-abuse-within-the-family-environment>

To help survivors, their families, or professionals find support, the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) has created a directory containing over 350 child sexual abuse support services in England and Wales. The Support Services Directory is a simple way to find services: <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/find-a-support-service>

A key finding - There are enormous barriers

for children to talk about sexual abuse within their family and that those working with children may not recognise what is happening to them, even when their behaviour may be indicative of abuse. Practitioners working with children and families need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and practical guidance so that they can identify and respond sensitively & confidently when there are concerns that a child may be being sexually abused. Problems with identification and response are of particular concern for children with disabilities and children from Black and other minoritised communities.

Practitioners need to understand when and how they should talk

sensitively to children about concerns about sexual abuse. There needs to be better join-up too between the child safeguarding and criminal justice responses. Drift and delay in criminal proceedings can leave children feeling stranded as they wait to know what is happening. It highlights the very critical need for the police, social workers, health, and others (including schools and probation) to work better together, keeping children's best interests at the heart of all enquiries and investigations.

National Level - The Panel is calling for Government to put in

place a national action plan to address the systemic failings across all services to recognise, respond and support children who may be at risk of, or are already, being sexually abused by someone in their family. The recently announced reforms in the government's paper 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive' represent an important step in the right direction, but it is vital that the findings & recommendations from this national review are all taken forward within the government's reform strategy.

The report sets out **National Recommendations** for change aimed at Government, Cafcass, family courts, inspectorates & other national agencies.

These cover; **National strategic plan, Professional knowledge, skills and confidence, Enquiries and investigations, Talking to children, Health, Criminal investigations and charging advice, Family courts, Cafcass and Inspectorates**

Local Level - The Panel sets out 6 recommendations for Safeguarding Partnerships to help them assess & develop practice and services in their area.

Strategic planning, Professional knowledge, skills & confidence, Enquiries & investigations, Assessment of people presenting risk of sexual harm, Talking to children & Health

Questions that you might want to reflect upon as a professional

The Panel have set out some questions that you might want to reflect upon as a professional, either individually, as part of supervision, or as a group:

Learning from the review

1. What are the key lessons in this national review for your organisation and your practice, including working with other agencies (including with probation services, education settings, police, health)?
2. Looking at the learning from this national review, do you have any reflections on whether you and your colleagues could have acted differently when responding to instances of child sexual abuse?
3. Looking at the key messages below for safeguarding partnerships, what are the immediate steps you and colleagues can practically put in place with respect to the identification and response to this form of abuse?

Working with children and families

4. How does your practice need to change so that the needs, voices and experiences of children who are sexually abused or at risk of being sexually abused are better addressed?
5. How well are the specific needs of children from Black and minoritised communities understood and addressed with respect to child sexual abuse within the family environment?
6. How well do you seek the views of children and non-abusing parents and carers?

