

RESPONDING TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE DURING COVID-19

Victims of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation are potentially on lockdown with their abusers. Safeguarding has never been as important as it is during this crisis. During Covid-19 restrictions please be mindful of the extra risk to these vulnerable children and be extra vigilant to pick up cues.

What to know:

- 67% of victims of Child Sexual Abuse have been abused by a close relative.
- Children are often groomed to believe that they should never tell anyone about the abuse they are victim to.
- During lockdown, the protective factors around a child may have been removed and children may have less opportunities to disclose abuse.
- Exploitation and abuse can also happen online. With more children relying on their device, there is an increased chance for an abuser to access a victim through online means.
- Witnessing domestic abuse is child abuse.

What to look for:

- The behaviour of a child or young person around particular individuals is guarded. A child may seem particularly nervous or fearful.
- A child or young person may refuse to engage with you entirely.
- A perpetrator may make it impossible for you to engage with a child, establishing excuses and intervening in any interaction.
- Signs of physical abuse or self-harm including burns, bruises, cuts, limping and facial expressions showing possible physical pain.
- Sudden unexplained changes of mood during interaction.
- Indicators of pregnancy.
- Signs of 'regressive' behaviour e.g. bedwetting.
- Parental concerns around a child's online activity and interactions.
- An extreme response to routine interaction with the parent/s. This may manifest in aggression or threat.

In responding to child abuse concerns:

- Victims may not always look 'vulnerable' - stay curious and look beyond the obvious.
- Make sure you speak to the child away from the parents or any other adults.
- Listen and believe what the child is telling you and ensure their voice is central to your next steps.
- Reassure the child, tell them it is not their fault and that you will take what they are saying seriously.
- If you have any concerns about a child, make a safeguarding referral to CASS (0121 303 1888) or discuss with the BSoICCG Safeguarding Team (07730 318300).
- Explain to the child what you will do next and that you will keep them informed.
- If you are called to visit a home where there is known domestic abuse, consider checking on the welfare of every child in the house, including those who are in bedrooms or who are asleep- if safe to do so.
- A child should never be left if it is assessed as unsafe to do so – call 999