



# Safeguarding Case Review

## Learning Brief: Child A



This multi-agency review considered the case of Child A, an older child who planned to take their own life, following serious sexual exploitation. Child A had been the subject of a Child Protection Plan, had been Looked After by the local authority and spent periods in hospital. Despite the relationships she had with a number of the professionals involved and their hard work to keep her safe, Child A remained at risk of suicide, self-harm and exploitation that was facilitated through the use of social media.

Those involved recognised the impact of Child A's former experiences and worked with the hypothesis that the family environment was associated with in Child A's behavioural presentation. Engaging with the family to address this was a constant challenge for professionals and required a sensitive persistent and tenacious approach.

The National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel stated in their [Annual Report 2018-19](#) that the 'complexity of such practice requires sophisticated conversation, hard wired into the DNA of our child protection practitioners'. It asks "how do we help people talk to each other within a context of high-risk, high-volume and limited resource, often when practitioners are fearful of reprisals from families, employers and society at large?"

Child A's case demonstrates that good information sharing, open communication between agencies and embedded relationships between the professionals working with a child can make a positive difference, but it also exposes the vulnerabilities when resources are limited, when there is limited understanding of some parts of the system, and when a child moves to another area.

*Throughout this brief, there are direct quotes from Child A that should also be considered as part of the wider learning.*

*"It is hard for a child to find the words. Be patient and give them your time"*

*"There is always a reason for a child's behaviour"*

### Voice of the child

The right people need to be in the right place at the right time to build relationships with children, to understand their needs and understand the risks to which they are exposed. They need the requisite skills and experience to do this complex work and to be well supported to do their job. Then they can respond to the needs of children with complex needs.

***Do I give enough time and provide the right environment for a child to speak about what is wrong?***

## Assessments & Planning - *an opportunity to reflect on your practice*

Despite children appearing capable and articulate, holistic assessments should consider past trauma, seek to understand a child's true capacity and inform plans to address needs and risk

*Do I ensure that I consider each new incident or concern as part of my accumulative assessment of a child and family? - Do I ensure that I don't make assumptions about how resilient a child is?*

Working with parents who can be challenging and intimidating is difficult for professionals.

*Can I identify when a family is hard to engage and seek support in doing so?*

Reflective supervision is important for all professionals working with highly complex families; it should include inter-disciplinary group supervision if a number of professionals are providing services. Professionals need to identify when parents blame their child for difficulties, and provide support but also respectful challenge.

*Am I able to respectfully challenge parents when required?*

Where appropriate, every effort should be made to engage with fathers/male partners as equal parents.

*Does my practice reflect the fact that a father is and should be treated as an equal parent?*

When a child does not want to share their allegations with the police or withdraws them, consideration must still be given to whether a criminal investigation is required and whether there is a need to safeguard the child through other proceedings.

*Do I confidently challenge if:*

*I'm concerned a child is being coerced to minimise or withdraw allegations previously made?*

*I think partners advice is inaccurate and/or I believe further safeguarding action is necessary?*

Despite needing to respond to urgent issues, opportunities to assess, plan and reflect should not be lost

"If a child withdraws allegations it doesn't mean they are not true, it probably means they are scared"

**Responding to missing episodes and concerns about the risk of exploitation**

Time and opportunity to build relationships is vital, enabling professionals to work in a meaningful way with children at risk of exploitation.

*Do I ensure I have time to build a relationship with a child if they are at risk of exploitation?*

Clarity about the law in relation to sexual exploitation, particularly for 16 and 17 year olds, is essential.

Relationships and good communication between professionals helps to prevent and disrupt CSE.

**Communication and information sharing between areas**

There are challenges in providing timely services for children living outside of their home area. Face to face meetings should be held as often as is practicable to ensure optimum information sharing, ownership and governance. While ensuring children's needs are being met within their placement, it is important they also maintain as many of the key professional relationships from their home area as possible,

*Do I endeavour to meet professionals face to face if a child is placed in another area?*

All professionals need to be aware of the options available when a child is in need of an urgent mental health assessment. This should include knowledge of when a Mental Health Act assessment might be suitable and how to these can be accessed.

"If a child says they want to die, don't say 'you don't', as they will probably want to prove you wrong"