

## Safeguarding children from sexual abuse



### 7 MINUTE BRIEFING

#### LCSPR: CHILD N

This case study is about a young child with ADHD who disclosed that she had been sexually abused by her stepfather. This briefing aims to share important learning about safeguarding children from sexual abuse.

April 2026

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### About Child N

Child N is a young white British female who previously lived with her mother and two half-siblings. She is described as funny and chatty and enjoys drawing and colouring.

Child N has a diagnosis of ADHD and attended a primary resource provision for children with moderate/complex needs.

Child N frequently told school staff about upsetting events at home, including being hit, pushed and called names by her parents. She later disclosed to her teacher that she had been sexually abused by her stepfather. N was removed and placed with an extended family member.

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### Background

Prior to N's disclosure of sexual abuse, there had been concerns regarding the family and referrals to children's social care. A range of concerns were identified including non-recent sexual and physical abuse, neglect, domestic abuse, alcohol and substance misuse and engagement in criminal behaviour by the stepfather.

Non-recent concerns included an allegation that N's stepfather had sexually abused a family member (N's maternal aunt) when she was a child. The investigation found insufficient evidence for a criminal conviction and the statutory assessment resulted in no further action.

N's mother experienced domestic abuse and was financially and socially dependent upon N's stepfather. Her fear of retribution, and her own previous domestic abuse experiences, prevented her from seeking support.

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### Patterns and practice

The account provided by N's mother was often accepted over N's, despite repeated concerns being raised.

The historic sexual abuse allegation involving N's stepfather concluded with no further action by police and social care, reinforcing the mother's belief that he posed no risk.

N's disclosure of sexual abuse at school triggered a referral to the Front Door Children's Services. The wider information of the family was not considered, and the school was asked to clarify whether N understood what sex meant. This resulted in N repeating her disclosure to the school and again in the ABE interview.

The focus remained on N's allegation of sexual abuse from her stepfather, rather than on a holistic assessment of the family and concerns about the mother's care of the children. This resulted in the children initially being left in the mother's care and at risk. This has now been re-considered.

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## Acknowledging good

When N disclosed sexual abuse at school, the teacher took time to support N and ensure that her voice was heard.

During the investigation, the social worker promptly identified that N preferred to communicate through drawings. This was sensitive to N's needs and helped to build a trusted rapport. The opportunity to communicate in this way enabled N to make a full disclosure, leading to a criminal investigation.

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## Key learning

Repeated raising of concerns should inform a holistic assessment to fully understand the child's lived experiences.

When a child discloses sexual abuse, it is important that professionals know how to respond appropriately and ensure the child's safety.

Following a disclosure from one sibling, the safeguarding needs of all children living in the family need to be considered.

The importance of hearing and understanding a child's voice should be reinforced in practice and can be heard and understood using diverse methods such as observing behaviour, drawing, and creative play.

Creating safe opportunities for victims of domestic abuse to be informed about local services and options can help to support their decision making.

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## Reflective questions

- How do you ensure that, when conducting an assessment, you review all known information, including any previous disclosures/concerns of sexual abuse within the family?
- How do you assess if a parent or caregiver's account is influenced by fear, coercion or previous traumatic experiences?
- What alternative methods of communication do you use to capture a child's voice and understand their lived experiences?
- How do you support parents/caregivers to understand the meaning and decision-making of 'no further action'? How do you ensure that 'no further action' decisions do not limit or deter your own assessments and decision-making?

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## Useful resources

Find more information about safeguarding children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds on the Panel's new learning hub:  
[www.childsafeguarding.independent-panel.uk](http://www.childsafeguarding.independent-panel.uk)

You can access videos, webinars, podcasts and other content, including the report: ["I wanted them all to notice"](#).

Read the full Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review: [Child N, Cheshire West and Cheshire Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

Further learning is available:

CSA Centre: [Communicating with Children](#)

NSPCC: [Insights on intrafamilial sexual abuse](#)

[National Analysis of Police-Recorded Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Crimes Report 2024](#)