

Safeguarding children from sexual abuse



7 MINUTE BRIEFING

LCSPR: THE SMITH FAMILY

This case study is about a 13-year-old girl who was sexually abused by a relative.

This briefing aims to share important learning about safeguarding children from sexual abuse.

April 2026

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About the Smith's

The Smith's are a White British family consisting of two parents and seven children ranging in age from early childhood to teenagers.

A relative disclosed to professionals that he had sexually abused a 13-year-old girl within the family and that her parents were aware of the abuse. He was found to be providing financial support to the family.

When police attended, they found the home covered with rubbish and hoarded materials. The upstairs floorboards were saturated with faeces and urine and there was no heating, lighting or water. The police used their powers to remove the children.

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Background

The Smith family were known to Children's Social Care with several episodes of involvement over a ten-year period. Concerns involved bruising to the children, physical chastisement, a lack of adult supervision, poor school attendance and the emotional wellbeing of the children.

Issues regarding the home conditions were raised by several professionals, including the police, employment and benefit workers, housing, education and tradespeople.

The children had been subject of Team around the Child plans (five occasions) and Child Protection Plans (CPPs) under the category of neglect (two occasions).

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Patterns and practice

The children often spent time with wider family members not known to agencies. Genograms were attempted, but the parents would not provide details about these individuals.

Crisis-driven responses took precedence, and chronologies were not effectively used in decision-making.

Multiple vulnerabilities increased the risk of grooming and abuse, and potential indicators of child sexual abuse were missed including:

- The emergence of wetting behaviours during the day and night when the child.
- Two other girls in the family were seen by medical professionals with genital injuries however safeguarding guidelines were not followed.
- Emotional outbursts and anxiety demonstrated by the children which were attributed solely to neglect.
- Evidence of sexual abuse in previous generations.

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Acknowledging good

Following the sexual abuse concerns, the Local Authority embedded a practice improvement process to support large families which included:

- Co-allocation of two social workers.
- Multi-agency peer supervision in child protection cases involving neglect.

Despite some difficulties in engaging with the parents, the social worker utilised the Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) twice with the family and each child was individually assessed. This is noted as good practice within the LCSPR.

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Key learning

Chronologies and genograms which involve the parent's own childhood histories, and the involvement of wider family members, aids the understanding of a family's story.

Children who have been neglected are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse. Professional curiosity to explore the underlying reasons for children's distress can lead to the identification of such abuse.

NICE guidelines should be followed in medical settings when genital injuries are present.

Observing a child's world is important to help develop an understanding of their lived experience.

Sexual abuse in previous generations can be a risk factor and increase the vulnerability of future generations to experiencing similar abuse.

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Reflective questions

- How confident do you feel in recognising and acting on indicators of child sexual abuse within a family context, particularly when there are other vulnerabilities present?
- How does your practice consider the lived experience of children over time?
- Do you access historical records to develop chronologies to understand cumulative harm? What challenges do you face, and how can you overcome these?

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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

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: [Stockport Safeguarding Children Report](#), The Smith Family

Further learning:

- [Graded Care Profile 2 \(GCP2\)](#)
- [Child Sexual Abuse: Learning from case reviews. NSPCC](#)
- [Intra-familial child sexual abuse | CSA Centre](#)
- [NICE Guidance](#)