

Safeguarding children from sexual abuse



LCSPR: MARIE

This case study is about a serious incident involving a young person called Marie, who died from drug-related causes after disclosing sexual abuse by a long-term foster carer. This briefing aims to share important learning about safeguarding children from sexual abuse.

April 2026

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About Marie

Marie was a White British female. She was a bubbly and clever girl who loved to help others. Her mother and sister described her as beautiful and a 'real firecracker'.

Professionals described Marie as friendly and open, with a good sense of humour. The lead reviewer (Part 1) found her articulate, engaged, thoughtful and passionate about improving professional practice and support to children in care.

Marie died from a drug related death as a young adult. In the last months of her life she had increasing health issues, including weight loss, insomnia, hallucinations and depression. Two weeks before she died, Marie took an intentional overdose.

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Background

Marie experienced significant neglect and entered care at a young age. Marie and her sibling were placed with long term foster carers after an adoption breakdown. Marie later disclosed sexual abuse by her long-term male foster carer. The review found there was evidence of concerns about the quality of care prior to the allegations of sexual abuse.

Two LCSPRs identified learning about the support Marie received as a child in care, as a care leaver, and as a victim of sexual abuse.

Prior to her death Marie had been misusing cocaine and alcohol, was suffering from seizures, and experienced mental health difficulties.

Marie received a large compensation payment at age 18. It is now known that she spent over £100,000 in the 7 months before she died.

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Patterns and practice

Numerous changes in professionals in the two years prior to the abuse being disclosed resulted in Marie feeling unable to build trust and relationships with professionals.

Unclear escalation of foster carer concerns resulted in a lack of clarity when there should be a Cause for Concern or standards of care response where neglect concerns are evident in a foster placement.

One of Marie's later partners was known to MARAC which led to concerns about her intimate relationships. The impact of a domestically abusive relationship would have added to Marie's trauma and mental health.

Recognition that being a care leaver is an additional vulnerability, particularly for those who require mental health support.

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Acknowledging good

Young people can choose whether to be assigned a Personal Advisor (PA) to support them with pathway planning before their 17th birthday. A PA can provide consistency for a young person when reaching the age of 18. The need for a good handover of information is a must in this process. Marie and her Staying Put carer recognised this as a benefit and Marie reportedly liked her PA.

Independent 6-monthly reviews of Pathway Plans by a senior social worker (separate from the young person's social worker, PA, and their line manager) up to age 25, ensures consistent oversight.

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Key learning

Financial safeguarding is critical for care leavers, especially those who face additional vulnerabilities, such as mental health difficulties, or substance misuse.

Educate and empower young people about their right to request the disclosures of domestic abuse information about a partner (Clare's Law).

Develop awareness of the corporate parenting principles for looked-after children and care leavers.

Support young people's transition by recognising and meeting the therapeutic needs of carers (including "Staying Put" carers) caring for those who have experienced trauma and adversity.

Refer for a health assessment to a specialist nurse for children in care, enabling tailored support empowering young people's decision making.

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Reflective questions

- How confident are you at recognising indicators of child sexual abuse and adult behaviours that may indicate risk?
- How confident are you in your understanding of the local arrangements for raising concerns regarding foster placements and thresholds of harm for LADO referrals?
- Do you recognise the additional vulnerabilities of care leavers during periods of transition? Are you confident in identifying these and referring to adult social care when needed?
- Do you use reflective supervision to explore trauma and lived experience in your casework?

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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: [Marie \(parts 1 and 2\)](#), [Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

Further learning is available in statutory guidance: [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers](#)