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Background

The National Panel published a review in Nov 2024. "I wanted them all to notice", is about child sexual abuse within the family environment. The voices and experiences of the 193 children at the heart of this review make very plain that too often we fail to notice and act to help and protect children from sexual abuse in their families. In recent years, very necessary attention has been given to the sexual abuse of children in public institutions, by strangers on the internet and by 'high profile' individuals. The uncomfortable truth, that safeguarding professionals know well, is that very many children are sexually abused by someone they know well and in their own home. This review report seeks to shine a light on the many systemic and practice barriers to giving children the help & protection they need when they are abused within their families'.

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Why it matters

There are enormous barriers for children to talk about sexual abuse within their family and that those working with children may not recognise what is happening to them, even when their behaviour may be indicative of abuse. Practitioners working with children and families need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and practical guidance so that they can identify and respond sensitively & confidently when there are concerns that a child may be being sexually abused. Problems with identification and response are of particular concern for children with disabilities and children from Black and other minoritised communities.

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Information

There is a need to understand when and how they should talk sensitively to children about concerns about sexual abuse. There needs to be better join-up too between the child safeguarding and criminal justice responses. Drift and delay in criminal proceedings can leave children feeling stranded as they wait to know what is happening and this should never be a reason to not 'talk'. It highlights the very critical need for the police, social workers, health, and others (including schools and probation) to work better together, keeping children's best interests at the heart of all enquiries and investigations.

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National Level

The Panel urges the Government to implement a national action plan to address systemic failings in recognising, responding to, and supporting children at risk of or experiencing sexual abuse within their families. The report outlines National Recommendations for change targeting Government, Cafcass, family courts, inspectorates, and other national agencies. Key areas include a national strategic plan, professional knowledge, skills, and confidence, enquiries and investigations, talking to children, health, criminal investigations and prosecution charging advice, family courts, Cafcass, and inspectorates.

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Questions to consider

Read the full review report here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-review-into-child-sexual-abuse-within-the-family-environment>

To help survivors, their families, or professionals find support, the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) has created a directory containing over 350 child sexual abuse support services in England and Wales. The Support Services Directory is a simple way to find services: <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/get-support/>

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What to do

Reflective Questions

1. How does your practice need to change so that the needs, voices and experiences of children who are sexually abused or at risk of being sexually abused are better addressed?
2. How well are the specific needs of children from Black and minoritised communities understood and addressed with respect to child sexual abuse within the family environment?
3. How well do you seek the views of children and non-abusing parents and carers?

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Local Level

The Panel sets out 6 recommendations for Safeguarding Partnerships to help them assess & develop practice and services in their area.

- Strategic planning,
- Professional knowledge, skills & confidence,
- Enquiries & investigations,
- Assessment of people presenting risk of sexual harm,
- Talking to children & Health

