



Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) – Briefing Note – barriers to disclosure

In July 2019 IICSA published its investigation report into “Children in care of the Nottinghamshire Councils.” This briefing note has been prepared to highlight one of the key themes from the inquiry.

Why so many people do not report abuse.

Research indicates that:

- Up to two thirds of children do not disclose abuse during childhood,
- Only around 25 percent of those who are abused disclose when they reach adulthood.
- For those who do disclose, it takes them on average around 24 years to do so from the time of the abuse.
- Older children who do disclose will most frequently do so to their peers.

The inquiry identified several barriers to disclosure

- Fear of not being believed, or of being told by the perpetrator that they would not be believed.
- Being scared, threatened with violence by the perpetrator or told by them not to tell anyone.
- Having no one to whom they felt able to disclose, which may be due to a lack of trust, a feeling of isolation, a lack of opportunity to speak to a social worker on their own, or not having the same social worker for a sustained period.
- Feeling embarrassed, ashamed or guilty, including because of grooming.
- Not understanding what was happening at the time or seeing the abuse as normal, possibly due to grooming or past abuse.
- Thinking that disclosure was not worthwhile, including due to a negative response to previous disclosure or because staff were involved or implicated in some way in the abuse.
- Fear of being separated from family.
- Inhibition by shock, trauma or mental health problems caused by the abuse.
- Fear that disclosure would affect their next placement

KEY MESSAGES & FURTHER GUIDANCE

“Professionals need to be alert to a child’s attempts to begin to disclose. The information children share may be piecemeal and not necessarily evidential. What children say must also be viewed in the context of their behaviours and professional concerns in order to formulate a clear assessment of risk and plan of protective action.”

“Even if a child makes an initial disclosure of abuse, the barriers to reporting may lead them subsequently to retract their disclosure. Professionals need to deal with retractions cautiously and consider the possible reasons behind them.”

“Evidence suggests that children in care can be more vulnerable to abuse than other children, which may be due to their experiences prior to coming into care.”

The inquiry was clear that following recognised practice will assist to reduce the barriers to disclosure for children in the future.

More detailed advice and guidance can be found in the Interagency Safeguarding Children Procedures including: -

- Recognising and responding to concerns
- Hearing and observing the child
- Child sexual abuse
- Children living away from home

<https://nottinghamshirescb.proceduresonline.com/>