

# 01 Background:

Familial or *Intrafamilial sexual abuse* refers to sexual abuse that occurs within the family. In this form of abuse, a family member involves a child in (or exposes a child to) sexual behaviours or activities. The “family member” may not be a blood relative, but could be someone who is considered “part of the family,” such as a godparent or very close friend.

The Crown Prosecution Service Guidelines (2013) on the Sexual Offences Act 2003, state: “These offences reflect the modern family unit and take account of situations where someone is living within the same household as a child and assuming a position of trust or authority over that child, as well as relationships defined by blood ties, adoption, fostering, marriage or living together as partners.”

# Why it matters:

In recent [research](#) on the prevalence of child sexual abuse, 11.3% of 18-24 year olds reported that they had been a victim of contact sexual abuse in childhood. If applied to the population of children in England, this prevalence rate suggests that 1.3 million children living in England today will have been sexually abused by the age of 18.

It is difficult to measure the scale of child sexual abuse in the family environment specifically, owing to deficiencies in data collection and recording procedures. A report by the [Children’s Commissioner](#) in 2015 estimated, that child sexual abuse in the family environment comprises around **two thirds** of all child sexual abuse.

Children who have been abused by a family member are more likely to blame themselves those who are abused by someone outside the family unit. This is particularly true of older children, who may be all too aware of the effect that disclosing the abuse will have on other family members.

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## What to do?

- Further research
- [NSCC Procedures](#)
- [Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse](#)
- [Seen & Heard e-learning](#)
- [Making Noise: Children’s Voices for positive change after sexual abuse](#)
- [Victim and Survivor voices from the Truth project](#)
- [Neglect and intrafamilial sexual abuse](#)
- [Share some secrets resource](#)

## Questions

- Am I prepared to think the unthinkable?
- How can we facilitate disclosure?
- Has the risk of sexual abuse been considered where there are concerns about abuse and neglect?
- Is there a risk that the signs and symptoms of sexual abuse, including lack of inhibition or aggressive behaviours may wrongly have been attributed to with the child’s learning difficulty or their disability?

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**Familial Sexual Abuse**

## Information: Impact

The abuse and the breach of trust between victim and perpetrator – for many victims abuse leads to problems with mental and physical health, relationships and behaviour in general.

- The reaction of the family – the disclosure or discovery of sexual abuse within a family is likely to have an enormous impact on the victim and their relationship with other family members, and this reaction may mitigate or exacerbate the impact on the victim.
- Legal processes risk re-traumatising victims, both pre-and post-trial. Issues include children not receiving court familiarisation visits, long delays in waiting for trial, low use of special measures to help children give best evidence, and aggressive cross- examination techniques.

## Information:

- Research demonstrates that many victims wait until adulthood before telling someone that they have been sexually abused
- The majority of known victims are female
- A significant number of cases of sexual abuse in and around the family involve young people as the perpetrator - in itself, a possible indicator of experiences of sexual abuse.
- Many victims of abuse do not recognise that they are being abused until much later in life. This is particularly likely for younger children, where perpetrators normalise the experience of sexual abuse.

- Children from some BME groups, & children with disabilities or learning difficulties may face additional barriers to disclosure.
- Many victims are abused by several perpetrators, and in many cases, perpetrators will be known to each other.
- Poly-victimisation – the experience of multiple forms of abuse – appears to be relatively common

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