

Protecting children and young people from sexual abuse

National Strategy for Preventing and Responding to
Child Sexual Abuse in Wales 2026-2036



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



A summary for young people

Hello

The Welsh Government wants all children and young people to have healthy, happy lives. We want to keep them safe and protected from harm and abuse.

This is our 10-year strategy to stop child sexual abuse and to make sure people get the right support when they've experienced sexual abuse.

What is child sexual abuse?



Child sexual abuse is forcing a child to take part in sexual activities.

This is a serious crime, and it is never the child's fault.

Contact abuse, when there is physical contact or touching:

- touching any part of a child's body in a sexual way, even through clothes
- using a body part or object to rape a child
- making a child touch someone else or take their clothes off.

Non-contact abuse – when there is no physical touching, but the abuse still causes harm. This can happen in person or online. It includes:

- showing children pornography — sexual pictures or making them watch people have sex
- making or sharing sexual pictures or videos of children
- making children do sexual things on social media, video, over the phone or in messages
- making children take part in sexual conversations.

Getting the right support makes a big difference.



This document talks about child sexual abuse which can be upsetting. If you or someone you know needs support, help is available.

Childline – 0800 1111

Free and confidential support for children and young people.

Live Fear Free Helpline – 0808 80 10 800

Free, 24/7 support if you are affected by sexual abuse or violence.

Mental Health 111 (Option 2)

Free, 24/7 mental health support. You can call even with no phone credit.

C.A.L.L. Helpline – 0800 132 737

Confidential support if you are worried about your mental health.

NSPCC – 0808 800 5000 or email help@NSPCC.org.uk



Why this is important

Sexual abuse can have a big effect on someone's life — both now and in the future. It can affect:

Mental health

- feeling anxious or low
- problems with eating or sleeping
- feeling numb, angry or overwhelmed
- flashbacks, nightmares or PTSD.

Physical health

- stomach or digestion problems
- long-term pain or tiredness
- gynaecological or sexual health problems
- heart health issues.

Growing up and relationships

- finding it hard to trust people
- struggling with closeness, sex or touch
- feeling unsure or unsafe in relationships.

Confidence and life opportunities

- low self-esteem or confidence
- finding school, college or work harder
- feeling like life is harder than it should be.

Child sexual abuse can include:

- **Child sexual exploitation** – when someone takes advantage of a child or young person and gets them to do sexual things in return for attention, money, gifts, drugs or protection. This can happen in person, online or through pressure from others.
- **Harmful sexual behaviour** – when a child or young person shows sexual behaviour that's not okay, not safe or not appropriate for their age. This might hurt others or themselves.



Child sexual abuse...



It's more common than you think.

15% of girls and **5%** of boys experience sexual abuse before the age of 16.



In England and Wales each year...

It is estimated that
500,000

children and young people are sexually abused. But most don't get recorded by police or identified by child protection services.

People who abuse

People who abuse come from all walks of life. They are not easy to spot and sometimes are still children themselves. Children are most often sexually abused by someone they know and trust.



Sexual abuse thrives in secrecy and silence.

So, it's important to talk about it and break the silence.

Online sexual abuse is growing fast. In 2023/24, over a third

39%

of sexual offences against children were online.

Our vision

All children in Wales live their lives free from the harm of child sexual abuse.

Anyone affected by child sexual abuse is protected and supported across their life.

About this strategy

Organisations, professionals and people across Wales helped us develop this strategy.

Keeping children and young people safe is everyone's business. So, this strategy is for everyone across Wales.

It's about:

- **Prevention** – stopping and reducing the risk of abuse.
- **Identification** – training professionals to spot the signs of abuse.
- **Response** – giving people the support they need.
- **Collaboration** – making sure services can work well together — schools, police, health and more.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** – checking this strategy is making a big difference to people's lives.

Big changes take time so, this is a 10-year strategy.

This strategy aims to stop abuse before it happens, protect children when there are worries, and make sure people get the right support.

We want Wales to be a place where every child feels safe, cared for, and able to thrive.



This strategy has four goals.



Goal 1: Preventing child sexual abuse from happening

What we want to see:

Everyone feels safe and confident to talk about child sexual abuse.

Everyone is empowered to keep children safe from sexual abuse and know how to report concerns.

Communities can spot, respond to and report concerns about child sexual abuse.

Actions

We will:

- develop a communication plan to raise awareness of child sexual abuse
- check what resources are available for people and if there are gaps — create new ones
- make it easier to find information by bringing resources together in one place
- make sure adults and children have the right information about child sexual abuse and healthy relationships
- encourage communities to talk about and report child sexual abuse
- increase understanding that some children are more at risk than others
- hold community events on how to keep children safe and stop abuse
- consult with children and young people on how to make places safer
- promote using the right language about child sexual abuse, so people don't feel judged or blamed
- make sure parents and carers know how to spot child sexual abuse
- makes sure everyone knows and understands trauma and what it looks like
- give support and information to young people
- educate all children about healthy relationships and how to report issues.



Goal 2: Protecting and responding to children and young people when there's a concern about child sexual abuse

What we want to see:

All professionals have training in child sexual abuse to help them keep children safe.

Parents and carers get the right support at the right time.

Services work together when there are concerns of child sexual abuse.

Children and young people are confident that they'll be listened to and believed if they're being sexually abused or feel at risk.

Actions

We will:

- work with the Regional Safeguarding Boards to develop a child sexual abuse pathway that has clear steps on how to support people
- check what resources are available for professionals and if there are gaps — create new ones
- explore setting up an online hub that offers professional advice
- make sure guidance for professionals about helping children who are affected by abuse is up to date and easy to understand — and that everyone knows about this guidance.



Goal 3: Supporting children and families affected by child sexual abuse

What we want to see:

All children and young people have the right support, at the right time.

Families, and others in the life of children and young people who've been affected by child sexual abuse, have support.

All services and staff can give people the right support at the right time.

Actions

We will:

- make sure everyone knows what services are available so they can get support
- make sure there are specialist counselling and support services for children and young people
- raise awareness of organisations that give counselling and support
- make sure professionals have the right knowledge, confidence and skills to help people affected
- make sure everyone working with children understands trauma
- involve families in planning support
- support families to spot and manage the effects of child sexual abuse within their family
- listen to the experiences of families and involve them in developing resources
- make sure children and families can get specialist support when a family member is arrested for child sexual abuse, including online abuse.



Goal 4: Supporting adults affected by child sexual abuse

What we want to see:

A culture of openness and understanding, where adults feel safe and confident to talk about the sexual abuse that happened to them as a child.

All young people have the right to support as they become adults.

All services and staff provide the right support to adults who were sexually abused as a child.

Actions

We will:

- make sure professionals understand the long-term impact of child sexual abuse
- make sure young people who've been sexually abused get the right support and are kept safe
- make sure 18–25-year-olds affected by child sexual abuse get the right support from services for issues like homelessness, substance misuse, and mental health
- raise awareness of organisations and support for adults who experienced child sexual abuse
- make sure adult social care services understands how best to support adults who have been affected by sexual abuse
- make sure services support young people with harmful sexual behaviour so they're safe as adults
- develop training for professionals so adults are always asked if they've experienced child sexual abuse when they meet with support services
- improve how we support young people affected by child sexual abuse as they become adults.



Other priorities

To make sure this strategy makes a difference we will also:

Make sure services collect information about child sexual abuse in the same ways across Wales. This will help people understand how often child sexual abuse happens and where support is needed.

Make sure services have:

» **one clear way of working and dealing with child sexual abuse, across all of Wales.**

» **one clear way to help when there are worries about child sexual abuse.**

This will help children and young people get the same quality of support, no matter where they live.



Our principles

This strategy is built on these 9 principles. We will:



Put people first — Listening to children, young people, and adults. Taking their views seriously.

Work together — People who have experienced sexual abuse will help design and improve services.

Protect people's rights — Respecting children and young people rights.

Be trauma-aware — Recognising that trauma can affect how people think, feel, and act.

Support everyone — Support should be easy to access and work well for everyone, no matter who they are or where they live.

Look at all areas of life — Understanding that people's lives have many parts and are shaped by many things.

Stop harm before it happens — Giving the right help as early as possible.

Not shame or blame people — No one should feel judged, blamed, or ashamed about sexual abuse.

Focus on what makes a difference — Checking how our actions are working and making changes if needed.

Working together

We can't do this alone. So, over the next 10 years we'll work with:

- other departments across the Welsh Government
- community leaders and community services
- organisations and charities
- schools, colleges and other education services
- social care services
- health services
- police and probation services
- Regional Safeguarding Boards
- National Independent Safeguarding Board
- Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board
- other providers of support services.

Making sure it works

We want this Strategy to make a difference across Wales and stop child sexual abuse.

A Strategic Implementation Group

We will bring together a group of professionals to help deliver and check this Strategy. They will look at what's working, what needs to improve, and where we need to learn more. They will also set up action groups to help deliver this strategy.

Listening to people

Children, young people and adults who have been affected by sexual abuse will continue to help guide this work.

Advisory group

We will set up an advisory group that has professionals from across Welsh Government departments. They'll help us make sure our actions link to other plans and policies. This will give us an opportunity to work together and share good practice.



Next steps

This is a 10-year Strategy, but the first step includes a 3-year action plan.

During this time, the work will be checked regularly so changes can be made if something is not working well.

After the first 3 years the Strategic Implementation Group will develop and publish a progress report. It will tell us the difference this is making and if it needs any changes.



Thanks for reading 

If you want to know more about this Strategy go to:

gov.wales/national-strategy-preventing-and-responding-child-sexual-abuse

