

Child Sexual Abuse **STRATEGY**

2023 - 2026



North East Lincolnshire
Safeguarding Children's Partnership

A multi-agency strategic plan for *preventing, identifying, and responding* to Child Sexual Abuse.

The vision of the Child Sexual Abuse strategy

“We believe that Child Sexual Abuse is preventable, not inevitable.”

The North East Lincolnshire Mission Statement for the Child Sexual Abuse strategy

To prevent children and young people from experiencing Child Sexual Abuse and to intervene at the earliest possible stage to tackle its causes and reduce the impact on children when it happens.

The purpose of the strategy

This Child Sexual Abuse Strategy has been developed in partnership with Safeguarding Children Partnership (SCP) member agencies to provide families, communities, professionals, and decision makers with some understanding of Child Sexual Abuse and the reason why a Child Sexual Abuse strategy is needed. It also sets out a plan to meet children’s and family’s needs in the context of Child Sexual Abuse in all forms (See Page 6 preventing sexual abuse).

This strategy has been developed considering local data compared with national data of Child Sexual Abuse, as only by knowing the nature and scale of the problem locally, can all partners work together to address and prevent all types of Child Sexual Abuse. In considering the local data we have concluded that the data we hold is not currently consistent and there is not an effective method of collecting and reviewing data. The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse suggests that the core data set should include data on the person experiencing sexual harm, the suspected person causing the sexual harm, the context of the abuse, and the service response. Therefore, to prevent Child Sexual Abuse, we need to strengthen our partnership approach to consistently collecting, reviewing, and using relevant data. When collected, the data will form part of the Safeguarding Children’s Partnership core data set and will be used to inform the Strategic Delivery 6 P Plan that sits under the strategy. This data will help us identify gaps in service provision and will support all partners to prevent and address Child Sexual Abuse.





The Governance arrangements for the delivery and embedding of the strategy will be achieved through the 6 P Strategic Delivery Plan, which will monitor progress against the Strategy and identified outcomes and will report to the SCP Operational Group on progress against the identified actions. The 6 P Strategic Delivery Plan will undertake all operational aspects of work within the strategy. All involved partner agencies are responsible for contributing to the delivery of the strategy which is detailed within the 6 P Delivery Plan.

The World Health Organisation recognises Child Sexual Abuse as a preventable public health issue that substantively contributes to the global disease burden.

Supporting the public health case to prevent Child Sexual Abuse is a UK economic one; NSPCC research estimated that the cost of Child Sexual Abuse to the UK in 2012 was between £1.6 billion and £3.2 billion (Saied-Tessier, 2014). If we consider an inflation related uplift, for 2023 this figure can now be estimated to fall between £2.1 billion to £4.2 billion at current prices. This figure in addition to personal costs, is also composed of shared financial costs for communities and the nation in terms of healthcare costs, productivity costs, child welfare costs, costs to the justice system and education.

<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/documents/signs-and-indicators-a-template-for-identifying-and-recording-concerns-of-child-sexual-abuse1/>

The purpose
of the strategy



Defining Child Sexual Abuse

Working Together to Safeguard Children defines sexual abuse as behaviour which:

'Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.'

The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse.

- Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse.
- Sexual abuse can take place within the family environment and outside of the home
- Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.'
- Sexual abuse often occurs in conjunction with the other categories of child abuse, especially emotional abuse, in order to maintain control and secrecy.



Why is a strategy needed?

The Local and National Context


The North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Partnership have identified that local arrangements to both assess and respond to all types of sexual abuse require strengthening in order to improve practice in this area.

Local Context

The need for the development of a child sexual abuse strategy was as identified by the NEL SCP as a priority. This was based on the lack of a current strategy and identified gaps in data, training and local and national learning from safeguarding reviews in respect of sexual abuse. The strategy will enable a local base line assessment of the complexity of risk and need in respect of child sexual abuse to be under taken.

National Context

It has been estimated that 500,000 children and young people were sexually abused in the UK in 2019. 15% of girls and 5% of boys experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16. It is estimated by the National Crime Agency that between 350,000 - 850,000 individuals in the UK pose a sexual threat to children and young people. Most children struggle to disclose this abuse, with most disclosures coming years after the abuse, if at all. This can lead to unresolved trauma and impacts including severe physical and mental health difficulties, low educational attainment, and reduced life opportunities. As well as this social





cost, the annual cost to the UK economy of Child Sexual Abuse is calculated at £3.2 billion. Families, communities, and professionals find the system difficult to navigate and services hard to access. More work is needed to understand the best way to prevent Child Sexual Abuse and how this should be tailored to different contexts, individuals and environments in each community. **There are very few services focused on prevention.**

National Data tells us that more children and young people experience Child Sexual Abuse than services are currently aware of. The diagram below shows the scale of Child Sexual Abuse compared with agencies identification of it, evidencing that we are only identifying “the tip of the Iceberg” when it comes to Child Sexual Abuse.

Figure 1. The scale of child sexual abuse compared with agencies' identification of it



Sources: Home Office (2022a); Department for Education (2022a); Welsh Government (2022b); Radford et al (2011); Office for National Statistics (2022a). Numbers rounded to the nearest hundred/thousand. * Includes assessments identifying risk of child sexual exploitation.

Why is a strategy needed?



Anyone can experience Sexual Abuse

For us to get this strategy right, the Safeguarding Children's Partnership will promote our understanding of how Child Sexual Abuse originates.

Healthy relationships support healthy sexual development. The earliest relationship that most children have is with their parent or carer. Information and education on the importance of a secure relationship/attachment should be available for every new parent and carer. Some parents/carers will find this more of a challenge due to previous **Adverse Childhood Experiences**, that's because early life stresses can have a significant impact on children both on their physical and mental health into adulthood. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/aces-and-toxic-stress-frequently-asked-questions/>

Evidence shows that when a child has a **secure relationship/attachment** with their parent/carers and when they have fewer Adverse Childhood Experiences or have therapeutic support to help make sense of their Adverse Childhood Experiences, the child can make and sustain more healthy relationships/attachments, therefore, reducing a child or young person's vulnerability to sexual harm/abuse. <https://scholar.harvard.edu/sociology1152/attachment-styles-0>



Parents and carers are often the first source of information for children when it comes to learning about their bodies, and sex. Due to their close relationship and the influence, they have on their children's lives, parents and carers should play a key role in Child Sexual Abuse prevention. (Wurtele and Kenny,2010). To effectively prevent Child Sexual Abuse **parents and carers need to have knowledge of healthy sexual development** and be able to recognise indicators of Child Sexual Abuse and how to respond.

<https://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/sexual-abuse-learning-programme.htm>

Healthy Developmental Sexual Activity encompasses those actions which are to be expected from children and young people as they move from infancy through to adulthood, gaining an understanding of their physical emotional and behavioural relationships. Such sexual activity is characterised by mutual consent and understanding. **Child development** incorporates physical, emotional, cognitive, and sexual development. Children and young people develop sexually just as they do emotionally, mentally, cognitively and physically. The range of normative age-appropriate sexual behaviour changes as a child or young person grows and develops. <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1657/harmful-sexual-behaviour-framework.pdf>

Most sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people will sit within a normative development range. **Parents, educators, community and society** (media coverage and promotion of equality) have a role in prompting this normative development. The challenge for carers, professionals and the community is to identify sexual behaviours that fall outside this range and then assist in seeking the right support or help for the young person with those problematic behaviours. <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/schools/pants-teaching>

Anyone can experience
Sexual Abuse

Why do we need to
change the way we work

Why do we need to change the way we work

Today's children and young people are growing up in an increasingly complex world and living their lives seamlessly on and offline. This presents many positive and exciting opportunities, but also challenges and risks. In this environment, children and young people need to know how to be safe and healthy, and how to manage their academic, personal, and social lives in a positive way. Decision Makers, Parents and the Community need to know how to support children's healthy development including sexual development, be knowledgeable and comfortable to talk about all types of Child Sexual Abuse. It is crucial that children from universal, early help to child in need and child protection, receive support at the earliest opportunity. We need to ensure that community and the workforce have relevant knowledge and information to get the best support at the earliest point. The Child Sexual Abuse Strategy should be read in conjunction with the North East Lincolnshire Prevention and Early Help Partnership Strategy for Children and Families, and the Neglect Strategy.

The delivery of the strategy will include all SCP member agencies. Schools and educators have a requirement to make relationships education compulsory in all primary schools in England and relationships and sex education compulsory in all secondary schools. As well as making health education compulsory in all state funded schools. To enable schools and educators to feel confident in delivery of relationships and sex education access to

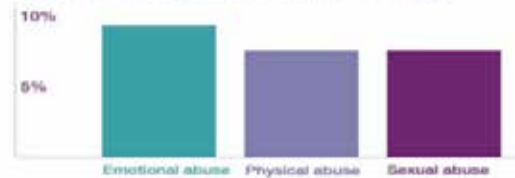


relevant training and support for staff is needed. (Department for Education, relationships education, relationship and sex education (RSE) and health education – Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietor’s, head teachers, principal’s, senior leadership teams, and teachers).

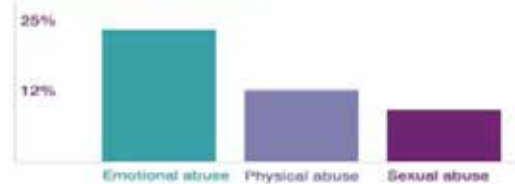
The child centre for expertise recognises that even where a child is placed on a child protection plan and there are concerns that they are being sexually abused, it is likely that a different primary category of abuse will be recorded on the plan. Further training for the workforce regarding Child Protection Categories and Data Collection is needed in reviewing and evaluating incidents of Child Sexual Abuse.

Research by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner (2015) found that, among children who had been sexually abused according to police data, more were recorded by children’s services under the categories of neglect (32%) or emotional abuse (29%) than under sexual abuse (20%). The study found that social workers considered neglect to be a “more straightforward” designation than sexual abuse (Child Sexual Abuse in 2021/22 Trends in official data, Kairika Karsna and Paige Bromley February 2023). Please see below an ONS graph from national statistics which identifies that the scale of Child Sexual Abuse is comparable to the scale of Physical Abuse and yet within Child Protection Assessments (as seen in the graph below) Child Sexual Abuse is not equally recognised.

Levels of child abuse identified in surveys



Levels of child abuse identified in child protection assessments



Who's at risk

All children regardless of gender are at risk of being sexually abused.

Most children who've been sexual abused were abused by someone they know. This could be a family member, a friend or someone who has targeted them. <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-publications/key-messages/intra-familial-csa/#what-is-intra-familial-csa>

Children who are sexually abused online could be abused by someone they know. They could also be abused by someone who commits a one-off sexually abusive act or a stranger who builds a relationship with them (grooming). <https://www.safernel.co.uk/abuse-neglect/sexual-harm-and-exploitation/>

Some children are more at risk of sexual abuse. Children with disabilities are more vulnerable to sexual abuse- especially those who are unable to tell someone what's happening or don't understand what's happening to them is abuse.

Some abusers target children who are isolated or being neglected by their parents or carers. If a family is going through a tough time, they might not be able to give their child enough attention or supervision therefore fail to identify the abuse.

Sexual abuse can be the most secretive and difficult type of abuse for children and young people to disclose. It may be particularly difficult to disclose abuse by a sibling.

Many children and young people do not recognise themselves as victims of sexual abuse - a child may not understand what is happening and may not even understand that it is wrong especially as the perpetrator will seek to reduce the risk of disclosure by threatening them, telling them they will not be believed or holding them responsible for their own abuse.

There may be a range of signs, but any one sign does not necessarily mean that a child is being sexually abused. However, the presence of several signs should indicate that you need to consider the potential for abuse and consult with others who know the child to see whether they also have concerns. <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/documents/signs-and-indicators-a-template-for-identifying-and-recording-concerns-of-child-sexual-abuse1/>

Plan for Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

North East Lincolnshire seeks to prevent all types of Child Sexual Abuse including intra-familial abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, child sexual exploitation and online abuse by working in partnership with children and families, communities, professionals and systems through the delivery of this strategy. The Child Sexual Abuse guidance and Child Sexual Abuse Pathway should be followed by all practitioners. [Child Sexual Abuse \(trixonline.co.uk\) https://www.safernel.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Multi-agency-pathway-for-suspected-child-sexual-abuse-flowchart2.docx](https://www.safernel.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Multi-agency-pathway-for-suspected-child-sexual-abuse-flowchart2.docx)

In order to be successful in preventing Child Sexual Abuse from happening, and protecting children who experience abuse, we must develop a better understanding of offending. <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/our-research/perpetration/a-typology-of-csa-offending/>

By Working together and sharing information we plan to develop an inclusive, strength based, sustainable and evidence-based approach to preventing Child Sexual Abuse. The approach will also be informed by data (identified as lacking both Nationally and Locally) and an understanding of trauma and its impact.

The local response will also be informed by The Government strategy “**Tackling Child Sexual Abuse**” whose ambition to strengthen the response to all forms of Child Sexual Abuse through three key objectives:

1. **Tackling all forms of Child Sexual Abuse and bringing offenders to justice.**
2. **Preventing offending and reoffending.**
3. **Protecting and safeguarding children and young people and supporting all victims and survivors.**

This Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) strategy is based on the following theory of change which is key to its success

Unmet Need

Children & young people may receive conflicting information around relationships, which leads them to develop unclear boundaries and expectations.
Children & young people may not recognise that what is happening to them is abuse, feel unable to speak out or not have the opportunity to do so.
Some parents and carers are uncomfortable talking about sexual abuse and don't know how to talk to children about healthy relationships.
Some parents and carers don't recognise when to get support early enough or what to do when they have a concern about their child(ren).
We need to recognise the impact on families who experience Child Sexual Abuse in all its forms and a need to support these families appropriately and intervene in a timely fashion.

There is a general feeling being uncomfortable with discussing the subject of CSA which leaves us ill-informed and subject to believing myths leaving children and young people unprotected
There may be a lack of awareness about some forms of sexual abuse, its impact in communities, and how people should respond to concerns about Child Sexual Abuse.
Communities may not be sufficiently supported to understand the roles they can play in preventing Child Sexual Abuse.
Communities do not feel empowered, and do not have the opportunity, to fulfil their role in ensuring local areas are safe places.
Lack of knowledge and training opportunities for community, professional and decision makers

Agencies/Professionals are not aware of what data is relevant to collect to understand the need locally.
Professionals may lack confidence and understanding of Child Sexual Abuse and the different types of Child Sexual Abuse, and do not feel empowered to take action because they lack time, space or/and opportunity.
Professionals' training may not adequately equip them to identify and respond to signs of Child Sexual Abuse or trauma in children & families.
Professionals may lack confidence and understanding of how to prevent harmful sexual behaviour and do not feel empowered to take action because they lack time, space or/and opportunity.
Professionals many feel Uncomfortable about talking about Child Sexual Abuser and harmful sexualised behaviour

Difficulties in coordination and partnership working between agencies which may make it hard to build and maintain an effective early intervention and prevention system.
There may be a lack of capacity for a 'trauma-informed' approach to preventing Child Sexual Abuse.
There may be a lack of integrated support for children and adults with concerning Sexual behaviour.
Lack of consistent and comparable data.

Proposed mandatory reporting, by government and understanding requirements.

What needs to happen?

Awareness raising activities to increase discussions and understanding of the importance of every day positive conversations about healthy relationships (self-esteem /assertiveness and consent) and sex and how we can all play a part in safeguarding children, in families and communities.
A range of quality-assured, tailored, evidence-based healthy relationships, sex and relationships education, which is integrated as a whole school/setting approach for 0-18-year-olds and their parents/carers.
A range of activities and services to provide children, young people and parents/carers with access to confidential support when they need it and ensure they have someone local to turn to when in distress or danger.

Campaigns, education, and support to initiate and enable community-led conversations about healthy relationships, consent, self-esteem, assertiveness .
Increase the community knowledge and understanding of the various forms of Child Sexual Abuse through discussion, media using reliable information/sources.
Awareness raising to help communities agree clear expectations about challenging all forms of concerning sexual behaviour locally and knowledge of where to go to for help.
Advice and support for community/voluntary organisations to help them prevent Child Sexual Abuse and encourage healthy relationships.

Partners to work together to understand what relevant data we should collect, review and use.
Organisations able to fill gaps in services identified.
Trauma awareness training and therapeutic relationships training.
Training to understand typologies of and how to identify Child Sexual Abuse - the gathering of information and data.
Enhanced access to Child Sexual Abuse knowledge and information to increase the confidence of professionals in identifying Child Sexual Abuse concerns early and continuing support to explore concerns (Centre of Expertise CSA).
Organisations offer time and space for training, supervision, and professional development

Strategic support to develop an integrated approach to preventing Child Sexual Abuse, based on identified gaps, including service provision, development of multi-agency commissioning arrangements, protocols, thresholds and tools.
Trauma informed services to support children, young people, parents/carers, community members and professionals to take a preventative approach to child sexual abuse and to assist recovery.
Influencing local partners' commissioning decisions to fund prevention services and activity in relation to preventing sexually harmful behaviour.
A working group to identify, gather and review data in relation to Child Sexual Abuse
Community knowledge and professional training opportunities, including mandatory reporting.

Outcomes

Children & families feel able to discuss Child Sexual Abuse
Children and families know about healthy relationships and what Child Sexual Abuse is.
Children & families know where to access support/services if they are concerned about Child Sexual Abuse
Children & families take action if they are concerned about Child Sexual Abuse.
Data informs us that Children, Young People and Families feel safer, have timely interventions, and have adequate support.

Community members know what Child Sexual Abuse is and recognise that, by working collectively sexual abuse can be prevented.
Community members respond appropriately if they have concerns relating to sexual abuse about a child/family.
Data informs us that Children, Young People and Families are safer in their communities.

Professionals feel confident in gathering the relevant data and know where and how and when to feed this back.
Professionals who work with children are more confident in talking about, identifying, addressing, and preventing Child Sexual Abuse
Gaps in service provision are filled appropriately
Data informs us that Professionals are able to identify, address and prevent Child Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse services that are evidenced-based, accessible, tailored and preventative are available for families and children, and those with harmful sexual behaviour.
Health, public services, and voluntary sector work together in a co-ordinated, responsive, evidence-based way to help prevent Child Sexual Abuse.
Better understanding of Child Sexual Abuse in the community and workforce.
A consistent and comparable data set that is used to inform services and practice.

What we will do – Our goals

(We - applies to all NEL partners and stakeholders working with children and young people)

Children and Families

We will ensure that the child's young peoples and family's voices and lived experiences are understood, heard, and responded to in a sensitive and supportive way.

We will help children, young people, families to have access to information and training and support their understanding of healthy sexual development and how to promote this

We will supply families with the relevant information and guide them to the most useful support. We recognize the impact on families effected by Child Sexual Abuse and their need for information and support at the earliest opportunity.

Community

We will, through public campaigns and education to build a community which are more aware and curious about Child Sexual Abuse.

We will help the community to have access to information and training and support their understanding of healthy sexual development and how to promote this.

We will supply communities with the relevant information and guide them to the most useful support. We recognize the impact on families effected by Child Sexual Abuse and their need for information and support at the earliest opportunity.

Professionals

We will collect relevant Child Sexual Abuse data locally to ensure our finite resources are invested in the right places.

We will recognize signs and indicators of Child Sexual Abuse in families, education, and community, across all levels of the thresholds of need.

We will support our workforce in learning about healthy relationships, appropriate childhood development and being curious when seeing vulnerabilities in children.

We will encourage our workforce to be curious when observing or assessing signs of sexualized behaviour in children and young people to help them identify patterns of sexualized behaviour which may require additional support.

We will introduce the workforce and the community to understand the different types of Child Sexual Abuse , to adequately assess and intervene and seek support for children young people and families.

We will develop the workforces understanding of Child Sexual Abuse by understanding their professional development requirements in this area and by researching the most up to date and relevant training opportunities. Making these training and development opportunities available to the North East Lincolnshire Workforce.

Systems

We will provide strategic support to develop an integrated approach to preventing Child Sexual Abuse including development of multi-agency commissioning arrangements, protocols, thresholds, and tools.

We will ensure relevant (guided by data) Sexual abuse services that are evidenced-based, accessible, tailored and preventative are available for families and children.

We will ensure that the community, workforce and decision makers have access to knowledge and relevant training about Child Sexual Abuse.



Measures for success

This strategy and its implementation are accountable to the North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board and all operational partners. A 6P Action Plan for Sexual Abuse sets out the multi-agency actions required to enable us to deliver this strategy and will include matters relation to training and strengthening partnerships in the area. The sexual abuse 6 P action plan will be subject to on-going review and challenge from the SCP Assurance Executive board.

We aim to achieve the following outcomes/outputs and will measure them as described in our 6 P's action plan (targets/measures to be determined):

1. Children are kept safe from sexual abuse because North East Lincolnshire is following a clear, systematic, multi-agency strategic approach to responding to Child Sexual Abuse in the county
2. Partner agencies are held to account for their performance and quality of interventions regarding Child Sexual Abuse
3. The Safeguarding Children's Partnership understands the prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse in North East Lincolnshire through gathering and analysis of data and provides the relevant response/services.
4. The North East Lincolnshire safeguarding workforce is skilled, prepared, well trained and works effectively with others to reduce Child Sexual Abuse in the county.
5. Children & families know where to access support/services if they are concerned about Child Sexual Abuse
6. Children & families know when and how to take action if they are concerned about Child Sexual Abuse.
7. Data informs us that the Community and professionals are more aware of Child Sexual Abuse.
8. Data informs us that Children, Young People and Families feel safer, have timely interventions, and have appropriate and adequate support.



Learning from Safeguarding Reviews

Summary of risk factors and learning for improved practice around Child Sexual Abuse (Source NSPCC 2020):

The reviews suggest that professionals are sometimes slow to identify sexual abuse as an explanation for a child's behaviour or medical presentations – particularly when other explanations are offered.

The learning highlights the importance of:

- professionals' ability to recognise and respond to sexual abuse
- displaying professional curiosity and challenge with families, carers, and other agencies
- keeping the child at the centre of practitioners' work.

This briefing focuses on Child Sexual Abuse committed by adults. [NSPCC Child Sexual Abuse: learning from case reviews](#)

For information on harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) which is displayed by children and young people, read the NSPCC HSB learning from case review briefing. [NSPCC Harmful Sexual Behaviour: learning from case reviews](#)



Summary & Next Steps

We know that Child Sexual Abuse can happen to anyone. We recognise the correlation of Child Sexual Abuse with Neglect, Physical Abuse (including Domestic Abuse) and Emotional Abuse. Therefore, this strategy overlaps with the other strategies covering these types of abuse and also the North East Lincolnshire Preventative Strategy.

- We will need to understand develop and analyse the Data Set regarding the victim, perpetrator, context and service response in respect of Child Sexual Abuse and its prevalence. We are aware that locally we don't have this data in a consistent or comparable format, and this is a national issue.
- We need to understand what support is available in our local area and how these services can be accessed in order to provide Children, Young People and Families as well as perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse with timely and appropriate support. This will be achieved through the 6 P Plan
- We will commit to reducing the numbers of children, young people and families experiencing Child Sexual Abuse.
- We will encourage all readers of this strategy to refer to the North East Lincolnshire Guidance for Child Sexual Abuse.
- In North East Lincolnshire we will learn from research and data to share this learning and knowledge with children, families and communities, we aim to work together to address gaps in knowledge and service provision to prevent and tackle Child Sexual Abuse in all its forms as a priority.
- We will develop a Workforce Strategy for to provide the children's workforce with clear direction of how to identify assess and respond to Child Sexual Abuse