

Child protection charity calls for journalists and politicians to invest as much thought and time on how to prevent child sexual abuse in the present days as on what has gone wrong in the past

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation, the only UK-wide charity dedicated solely to tackling child sexual abuse, is calling for the Government to be more forward thinking in how it deals with child sexual abuse. The Foundation is concerned that the current public and political debate overlooks present day risks, leaving children unnecessarily exposed to potential harm.

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation has spoken out as child protection experts prepare to meet to discuss how best to protect children from sexual harm (Eradicating Child Sexual Abuse conference - Tuesday, July 15).

Donald Findlater, Director of Research and Development at the Foundation said:

“Over recent months, we have experienced unprecedented attention to revelations about alleged sexual abuse in a range of institutions over the past 40 or more years. Of course we need justice for those who have suffered and may still be suffering. But it is just as important that we do our best to keep children safe in the present day. I am concerned that while we spend time and resources on past abuse, we neglect the possibilities of keeping children safe from abuse in the present and future.

“We want the Government, and others, to consider and resource a range of interventions which, in combination, can prevent abuse from happening in the first place, help offenders not re-offend, and help victims and their families recover.

“If the number of children currently affected by child sexual abuse were being affected by a health condition, such as a heart problem, the government would lead the way in trying to understand the cause, reduce the risk of children being affected and treat those already affected. It is about time we saw a similar response and drive to tackle the problem of child sexual abuse.”

Leading international experts will meet on Tuesday (July 15) at an event organised by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation and Child and Family Training to consider theory, policy and practice that is effective in protecting children from sexual harm. The Eradicating Child Sexual Abuse conference will explore the components of a public health approach to the prevention of child sexual abuse and look at examples of good practice from the UK and abroad. Speakers include:-

- Sue Berelowitz, Deputy Children’s Commissioner
- Donald Findlater, Director of Research and Development, Lucy Faithfull Foundation
- Jon Brown, Head of Strategy (sexual abuse) NSPCC
- Dr Arnon Bentovim, Child and Family Training
- Professor Stephen Smallbone, Griffith University, Australia

- Joan van Niekerk – President Elect, ISPCAN (International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect) and Social Work Consultant South Africa
- Professor Richard Wortley, University College London.

A public health model for preventing child sexual abuse distinguishes interventions aimed at preventing abuse before it would otherwise occur (primary prevention), reducing the risk of abuse in 'at risk' groups (secondary prevention) and preventing further offences by known offenders and re-victimisation of known victims (tertiary prevention). The new 'integrated theory of child sexual abuse' helps identify four distinct target groups:- offenders and potential offenders, children and young people (victims) families and communities and situations (places). By targeting these distinct groups at the three public health prevention stages, a comprehensive and effective approach to preventing abuse can be created.

The 120 conference delegates include representatives from the range of state and voluntary sector organisations that have contact with children or families or deal with child protection issues, including:- police officers, health workers, child care workers, social workers and those from the education and faith sectors. They will hear how the public health approach is being developed and applied in other countries to protect children from sexual abuse. Delegates will also be given the tools to further develop prevention thinking beyond the day.

Themes to be covered on the day include:-

- The economic cost of child sexual abuse
- Intervening with 'at risk' groups
- The role of men and boys in preventing child sexual abuse
- The role of sex and relationship education in prevention
- Responding to the challenges of risks from the Internet
- Creating safer places and a safer society

Donald Findlater added:

"Studies both here in the UK, across Europe and internationally tell me that at least one in ten children have experienced sexual abuse by the age of 18. A focus on arresting abusers and offering some form of reparation and justice to victims does little to prevent abuse from happening in the first place. Speaking as a father and grandfather preventing abuse must surely be my first priority. Speaking as Director of Research and Development with the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, I know there are key pieces of information that all adults need to know to play their vital part in keeping children safe. Just as there is information that will help children and young people keep themselves and each other safe. As a nation we are currently neglecting these aspects and it will be children who pay the price.

"Child sexual abuse is preventable, it is not inevitable. And it doesn't need another Government inquiry to deliver this protective information to children and adults. It needs clarity of vision, good leadership, modest resource and a plan to make it a reality. Surely this is not too much to ask to protect future generations from experiencing abuse."

-Ends-

Notes to editors:

For interview opportunities, further information or to attend the conference, please contact Deborah Denis on ddenis@lucyfaithfull.org.uk | 01372 847160 | 07540 690315

Please see

http://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/eradicating_child_sexual_abuse_july_conference_2014.htm for more information on the conference.

1. Theory

In 'Preventing Child Sexual Abuse' Smallbone et al (2008) present a 'new integrated theory' and argue that such abuse occurs 'as a result of interactions between individual, ecosystemic and situational factors' (p.21)*. There is a widespread potential for any child to be at risk of child sexual abuse (CSA), for any adolescent and adult male (and to a lesser extent female) to engage in CSA; but equally there is potential for each of these children to be protected from harm and for adults and adolescents to engage in the attitude and behaviour change needed to ensure this. Weak and insecure interpersonal and social attachments increase the risk for CSA. The likelihood of CSA depends on risk and protective factors in the social and physical environments of potential victims and potential offenders.

A public health model for preventing CSA distinguishes interventions aimed at:

1. Preventing CSA before it would otherwise occur (primary prevention)
2. Reducing the risk of CSA in 'at risk' groups i.e. preventing individuals from offending for the first time; preventing 'at risk' children from being abused (secondary prevention)
3. Preventing further CSA offences by known CSA offenders and preventing re-victimisation of known victims (tertiary prevention)

The new 'integrated theory of CSA' helps identify four distinct 'sets' of prevention targets.

1. Offenders and potential offenders
2. Children and young people – including victims
3. Families and communities
4. The situations in which sexual abuse does or might occur

	Primary Prevention	Secondary Prevention	Tertiary Prevention
Offenders and potential offenders			
Children and young people (victims)			
Families and Communities			

Situations			
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*Smallbone et al (2008) Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: Evidence, Policy and Practice.

2. About The Lucy Faithfull Foundation

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation celebrated 20 years of protecting children from sexual harm in 2012. Named after its founder, Baroness Lucy Faithfull of Wolvercote, The Lucy Faithfull Foundation is the only UK-wide child protection charity dedicated solely to reducing the risk of children being sexually abused. It works with entire families that have been affected by abuse including: adult male and female sexual abusers; young people with inappropriate sexual behaviours; victims of abuse and other family members. Drawing on expert knowledge about child sexual abuse the charity offers a broad range of services for professionals and members of the public. These include: assessments, intervention and treatment of known offenders, case specific advice and support, training and development courses and workshops, educational programmes for internet offenders and their families, circles of support and accountability, internet safety seminars for schools (teachers, parents and children) and Parents Protect! training for professionals, parents, carers and other adults. www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk. It also runs the Stop it Now! Campaign and Helpline (0808 1000 900) www.stopitnow.org.uk and www.parentsprotect.co.uk