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New report shows over half of parents and carers do not feel confident to protect their children from sexual abuse - while calls for help relating to protecting children continue to rise

July 15th, 2013: Six out of ten (59%) parents and carers are not as confident as they would like to be when it comes to protecting their children from sexual abuse. And if they had concerns only 70% would feel confident to act upon or report these concerns. 7.7 million families have dependent children in the UK¹ which could mean 4.5 million families are lacking the confidence to protect their children.

The only UK-wide charity dedicated solely to tackling child sexual abuse, The Lucy Faithfull Foundation, reveals the figures in a new report from its Stop it Now! UK and Ireland Campaign and Helpline.

Data was collected from 2,303 parents and carers who Stop it Now! worked with between October 2012 and March 2013. Parents and carers were asked to rate their confidence levels in a number of areas before attending a seminar on child sexual abuse prevention. Findings show:

- Prior to the workshop only 41% of parents and carers rated themselves as 'confident' or 'very confident' about being able to keep their children safe from sexual abuse. Post-workshop this almost doubled to 79%
- Prior to the workshop only 70% of parents and carers stated they felt 'confident' or 'very confident' about acting on, or reporting, any concerns they may have about child sexual abuse. Post workshop this had risen to 92%
- Prior to the workshop, only 27% of parents and carers stated they felt 'confident' or 'very confident' about being able to spot signs of sexual abuse in their child's behaviour. Post workshop this almost trebled to 79%
- Prior to the workshop only 13% of parents and carers felt 'confident' or 'very confident' about spotting potentially concerning behaviour in an adult. Post workshop 69% rated themselves as 'confident' or 'very confident'

The findings are contained in the Stop it Now! UK and Ireland Helpline and Campaign ten year report, which also shows that calls to the confidential resource climbed from 1,024 in 2003 to 5,676 in 2012. Over the last three years the number of callers has increased at an average rate of 24% each year as the public has become more aware of the Helpline's existence and as public concern about child sexual abuse has risen.

Calls fall into three main categories of caller:- adults concerned about their own sexual thoughts or behaviour (38%); family, friends and other adults concerned about the behaviour of another adult

¹ Office for National Statistics, Family Size 2012

(27%) and parents and carers concerned about a child or young person's sexual behaviour (6%). Other callers include adults concerned about children who may have been abused (5%), professionals seeking case advice (13%) and adult survivors of sexual abuse (7%).

Donald Findlater, Director of Research and Development with the Lucy Faithfull Foundation and Director of Stop it Now! UK and Ireland said:

“Our report clearly shows that while adults can and do take action to protect a child when they know where to go for help, many are not sure of what to look for and what action they can take if they do have concern. The Stop it Now! Helpline is one of the few places they can go for confidential, expert help, and growing numbers of adults are using the service.

“Child sexual abuse affects one in six children in the UK. Whilst it often hits the headlines, this is typically only after harm has been done. It is a scandal that so little is done to prevent abuse before it happens. Sadly the Parents Protect! sexual abuse prevention seminars, which achieved so much in improving the knowledge and confidence of those best placed to protect their children, have lost funding from the Department of Education, despite on-going demand. The Governments of Scotland and Wales continue to fund Parents Protect work for their parents and carers.

“If we are to take the problem of child sexual abuse seriously, we must behave as if prevention were a possibility. At present it feels like we are resigned to the fact that lots of our children are being abused and we simply wring our hands after the next publicised tragedy. This does nothing to stop it happening and it does even less for the thousands of children suffering abuse in silence.

“We need a public education campaign on the same scale as the drink drive and child obesity campaigns. We need Government to take a comprehensive look at services to prevent abuse from happening as well as to respond appropriately after it has happened – and we need all of this yesterday. Our children deserve nothing less.”

Peter Saunders, Chief Executive of the National Association for People Abused in Childhood, said:

“The majority of adult survivors of sexual abuse who contact the NAPAC support line tell us they were abused by someone they knew.

“It is absolutely vital that parents and carers are confident about what to look for and what to do if they have concerns. It is not up to children to protect themselves and we know very few children disclose the abuse that is happening to them at the time.

“Parents, carers, family members and other protective adults are best placed to protect children but they must be informed and able to seek help and take action if they have concerns.”

The Helpline and Campaign report covers ten years of pioneering work to protect children from sexual abuse. It concludes by stating that to really tackle child sexual abuse in the UK, Government needs to adopt a comprehensive approach to prevention.

The Stop it Now! Helpline is currently the subject of an independent evaluation funded by the EU and conducted by NatCen Social Research, Britain's largest independent social research organisation. Due to conclude in Spring 2014, the evaluation will inform the development of similar sexual abuse prevention helplines elsewhere in Europe.

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Notes to editors:

For interviews contact:

Donald Findlater, Director of Research and Development at the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, on +44 (0) 1372 847160 | +44 (0) 777 853 2851 | dfindlater@lucyfaithfull.org.uk

Deborah Denis, Media and Communications Manager at the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, on +44 (0) 1372 847160, +44 (0) 7540 690315 or ddenis@lucyfaithfull.org.uk

1. 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 www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk

2. About Stop it Now!

Stop it Now! UK and Ireland is a national campaign and Freephone confidential Helpline. It aims to prevent child sexual abuse by increasing public awareness and empowering people to act responsibly to protect children. Stop it Now! believes that it is the responsibility of all adults to take positive action to prevent the sexual abuse of children. Stop it Now! is supported by an alliance of leading children's charities including the NSPCC, Action for Children, Children England and The National Association of People Abused in Childhood, working with the government and child protection agencies, to promote public education and prevent child sexual abuse. The Stop it Now! helpline has been operating since 2002 and aims to prevent child abuse by encouraging abusers and potential abusers to seek help and by giving adults the information they need to protect children safely. The helpline is funded by the Ministry of Justice, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation and donations. www.stopitnow.org.uk