

**Stop It Now!**

WALES | CYMRU

Helping prevent  
child sexual abuse



# Child sexual abuse investigations: A guide for parents and carers

Practical information about what will happen if there is an investigation about your child being sexually abused.

[Click to start](#)



Call our confidential helpline **0808 1000 900** For more information visit [stopitnow.org.uk/helpline](https://stopitnow.org.uk/helpline)

**THE  
LUCY FAITHFULL  
FOUNDATION**

Working to protect children

# Our practical guide to help and support parents and carers



**Many parents and carers have feelings of shock, confusion, anger or fear after they find out that their child may have been sexually abused. You might also be experiencing strong feelings right now.**

This guide will give you practical information about what will happen if there is an investigation about your child being sexually abused. It includes links to information on supporting children, the process surrounding medical examinations, and prosecution, including where the police or Crown Prosecution Service decide not to proceed.

It is important to recognise the impact of this situation on your child, you, and those around you. Take steps to look after yourself, find support for you and your family, and know that there are no right or wrong ways to feel in this situation.

[Next ▶](#)

# What should I do first?



## How should I respond?

**Whether your child has told you or someone else about their abuse, it is vital to listen to them and reassure them that they have done the right thing in speaking about what has happened.**

It is important that your child knows that what they've said is being taken seriously and that they will be protected, and that what happened to them was not their fault.

If you are the first person they have told, you will need report the concerns to the police, and explain to your child what will happen next and how they will be supported.

## You can talk to someone

**The confidential Stop It Now! helpline works to prevent child sexual abuse and support people who want help to protect children. The experienced advisors will listen and offer confidential advice and support. When you call, you don't have to give your name or identifying details if you don't want to.**

This might be the right time for you to call the helpline and start to talk about what help you need. If you're not ready to speak to someone, you can send them a secure message or use their online live chat.

**Call 0808 1000 900 or visit [stopitnow.org.uk/helpline](https://stopitnow.org.uk/helpline)**

Next ▶

## Things to remember

- **Have open conversations** – let your child know you are there for them and that you will listen to them. Have open conversations about their feelings and give them time and space to talk.
- **Do not blame yourself or your child for what happened** - it can be difficult for us as adults to understand how sexual abuse can happen without us knowing. From our work with children who have experienced sexual abuse, hearing adults close to them say 'I believe you' and 'you are not to blame for what has happened' can be helpful and supportive for many children.
- **Ask important questions to ensure your child's safety, but do not ask any leading questions.** When your child does talk about the abuse, understand that by sharing this with you, it helps them make more sense of it all. They will be experiencing a range of feelings, some that they might find hard to cope with.
- **Know your own limits** – recognise that your own emotions might be difficult to cope with at times. You will need support from others to help you process what has happened. It is normal to feel angry and upset, but try not to show this to your child as they might think that you are angry at them for what has happened. Whether you have others to talk to for support or not, you can contact the confidential Stop It Now! helpline.
- **After reporting** – there will be a lot to take in, so making a note of things you are told by your child or by professionals involved might help you both immediately and in the longer run. You might also find that it helps to write down any of your worries or concerns, as this can help you feel in control of what is happening.
- **Help your child to be and feel safe.** Whatever has happened before, your child must feel safe from harm now. And if you are worried that your child or other children might still be at risk of abuse, you need to tell the police or local authority, even if this feels scary.
- **Develop a family safety plan** – it is normal to be worried about possible further risks to your child. Making a family safety plan can help you take practical steps to keep your child safe.
- **Where I can get advice and support for my child and myself?**

[See help and support services](#)

Next ▶

# About child sexual abuse



**WE HELP PARENTS AND  
CARERS PROTECT  
CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL  
ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION**

**Parents Protect**

Together we can prevent  
child sexual abuse

## What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. It can include physical contact or non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

**Find more information about child sexual abuse:**

[parentsprotect.co.uk/what-is-child-sexual-abuse.htm](https://parentsprotect.co.uk/what-is-child-sexual-abuse.htm)

## How can sexual abuse affect my child?

Child sexual abuse affects different children in different ways. For some children the impact isn't immediately clear, while other children display a range of emotions and behaviours. Abuse can have lasting and damaging effects on some children, such as fear, distress, shame, self-blame, low self-esteem, anger or memory loss.

However your child responds, it is important that they are given help and support. Children who experience abuse but who are made safe and are supported by protective parents and carers can and do recover, going on to lead normal, happy and fulfilled lives.

**Find more information about the effects of sexual abuse on children:**

[parentsprotect.co.uk/if-a-child-tells-you-about-abuse.htm](https://parentsprotect.co.uk/if-a-child-tells-you-about-abuse.htm)

Next ▶

# Reporting the abuse and next steps



## Who can I report sexual abuse to?

If you are concerned a child is being abused or has been abused in the past, you should tell the police, or your local children's social services department as soon as possible. If you need support, you can speak to experienced advisors on the confidential Stop It Now! helpline: 0808 1000 900.

## How do I make a report to the police?

Reporting that your child has been sexually abused may seem daunting but your child's safety and needs are always a priority to the police. There is no time limit for reporting child sexual abuse to the police.

**There are three main ways to report an offence. These are:**

- In an emergency, when a child is immediately at risk of abuse or the abuse is happening, you should call the police on 999.
- If your child has told you about sexual abuse, you should call the police on 101.
- You can also make a report online.

[police.uk/pu/contact-the-police/report-a-crime-incident](https://police.uk/pu/contact-the-police/report-a-crime-incident)

Your child can also contact the police themselves to report sexual abuse.

**Find more information about how to report abuse:**

[parentsprotect.co.uk/reporting-abuse.htm](https://parentsprotect.co.uk/reporting-abuse.htm)

Next ▶

## What happens next?

A police officer will meet with you to take some details, and your child will be referred to specially trained officers whose job it is to investigate sexual offences. Your child will be interviewed and asked to explain in their own words what has happened. The interview will take place in a private, comfortable and child-friendly space. Your child can take this at their own pace and their statement will be recorded in a child-friendly way to make sure it can be used as evidence in any future legal proceedings.

As a parent or carer you may want to stay with your child during their interview, however you will be asked to go to another room where you may be able to observe. If you witnessed the abuse happening or you were the first person your child told about the abuse, then you will not be allowed to observe. This is to make sure that any evidence from the interview can be used in any future legal proceedings.

A police officer will investigate your child's case and they will keep in regular contact with you to keep you updated.

## What if my child has additional learning needs?

If your child has additional learning needs then you might be worried about how they will cope or be looked after. Police forces have specially trained officers who are able to support your child through the process. This officer will make sure that your child is treated with sensitivity and understanding.

[Next ▶](#)

## Will my child need a medical examination?

**After the interview your child might be asked if they will consent to a medical examination. This is to help provide the police with more evidence.** They will be referred to a Sexual Assault Referral Centre, which have specially trained doctors, nurses and support workers, known as independent sexual violence advisors, who can give your child medical and emotional support. There are two Sexual Assault Referral Centres in Wales with staff trained to work with children: one in Colwyn Bay and one in Cardiff. Ideally, any medical examination should take place as soon as possible, and specialist doctors will discuss when is the best time for your child to be examined.

**Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Centre North Wales:**

[rasawales.org.uk/sarc.html](http://rasawales.org.uk/sarc.html)

**Ynys Saff Sexual Assault Referral Centre**

[cavuhb.nhs.wales/our-services/sexual-health/services-provided/ynys-saff-sexual-assault-referral-centre](http://cavuhb.nhs.wales/our-services/sexual-health/services-provided/ynys-saff-sexual-assault-referral-centre)

## What does a medical examination involve ?

**Medical examinations are not always intimate and a general examination can be helpful in identifying other health needs that your child might have that haven't been previously identified.**

Before your child is examined, there will be a discussion between the referrer (for example the police) and the medical team to inform

them of the circumstances. Once your child has been referred, you might be asked not to wash or change your child's clothes or not allow them to wash themselves. This is because essential evidence could be lost and gathering evidence is important for the police investigation.

You might be accompanied by a police officer or a social worker to the Sexual Assault Referral Centre, where your child will be seen by a paediatrician or a forensic medical examiner, depending on their age. Upon arrival, specially trained staff will meet you and explain in detail what will happen. They will also explain the process to your child, using pictures if appropriate for your child's age. Your child will be reassured that the examination is optional. They will be able to take as many breaks as needed and are allowed to skip a step or stop the examination any time they want to. The examination can last up to two hours.

## What happens after the examination?

**Results from the examination can take several weeks, and your child will be allocated independent sexual violence advisors who will support them and you through the process.** Your child will usually be offered follow up appointments at your local sexual health clinic or with a local paediatrician, and counselling services will also be available. Services between the two Sexual Assault Referral Centres may vary.

Next ▶



## Will children's social services be involved?

When a child sexual abuse report is made to the police, they will contact children's social services to help keep your child as safe as possible. A social worker may visit you and your child to talk about what support they can give you. If your family is already involved with the social services, then your child's allocated social worker will be informed, and they will contact you to discuss what has happened.

If you are a foster carer, social services may call a strategy meeting to explore their response, what information can be shared, and what support might be needed both for the child and for you.

Contact social services:

[wales.nhs.uk/LocalServices/?s=SocialService](https://wales.nhs.uk/LocalServices/?s=SocialService)



Next ▶

# The police investigation

## What happens during a police investigation?

The investigation might involve interviewing your child, witnesses and the person who is alleged to have committed the abuse. It may also include examining other materials, such as medical evidence or electronic devices. While the police carry out their investigation, the person who is alleged to have committed the abuse may be placed 'under investigation'. This means they have been released from custody without charge and without bail conditions, and that the investigation is ongoing.

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime includes certain rights for your child, including information that they and you are entitled to receive from the police.

### You should hear within one working day:

- Once a suspect has been arrested.
- If a warrant has been issued due to a suspect's non-attendance at court.

### Within two days of reporting the abuse:

- The police should pass your child's details to Victim Support unless you ask them not to do so.

### You should hear within five working days:

- If the crime is not being investigated.
- If the suspect is given an out of court disposal, such as a caution or reprimand.
- If the suspect is being interviewed under caution; released without charge or with bail conditions; or if their bail conditions are changed or altered in any way.
- To be supplied with written information about what to expect from the criminal justice system.

### Find out more:

[victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/your-rights/victims-code](https://victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/your-rights/victims-code)  
[gov.uk/government/publications/the-code-of-practice-for-victims-of-crime](https://gov.uk/government/publications/the-code-of-practice-for-victims-of-crime)

Once the police have investigated a suspect, they will decide what happens next. The police can:

- caution the suspect
- take no further action
- refer the case to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

[Next ▶](#)

## What is the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)?

The CPS is independent from the police. Their job is to make sure that the right charges are brought against suspects, to prepare cases to be presented at court, and to provide advice and support for victims and witnesses.

When deciding whether to charge someone for criminal offences, the CPS must be satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction, and that prosecuting the case is in the public interest.

If the CPS decide to charge the suspect and the case proceeds to a court hearing, you and your child will be informed of the date, time and location. If you are concerned that you have not received this information you should contact the investigating officer.

In the time between a suspect's charge and their first court appearance, they will be released on bail or remanded in custody, which means they will spend time in prison until the court date. This decision will take into account:

- an assessment of the risk the suspect might pose to your child, the public and any witnesses
- previous offences the person may have committed
- the suspect's previous compliance with bail conditions
- how likely it is that the suspect will fail to attend their court appearance.

If the suspect is granted bail there may be conditions imposed on them that they must abide by. These might include making sure they do not contact yourself or your child directly or through other people.

## Find out more about the Code of Practice for Crown Prosecutors

[Find out more](#)[Next ▶](#)

## What will happen in court?

Some offences can be dealt with at the Youth or Magistrates Court. Magistrates are trained volunteers who hear cases in courts in their community. They can impose a variety of sentences, but if they think they don't have the right powers for sentencing, they might refer a defendant to the Crown Court where longer custodial sentences can be given.

The Crown Court deals with the most serious offences. These courts are presided over by judges, who are fully legally trained.

- **If a defendant enters a not guilty plea** at the Crown Court, the case will be heard in front of a jury. If a defendant is found guilty, the judge will determine the sentence they receive.
- **If a defendant pleads guilty**, they will be sentenced either on that date or a later date.

If your child needs to give evidence, they are entitled to special help. These measures are put in place to help vulnerable witnesses give their best evidence in court, and to try to reduce some of the stress to them. These measures might include court staff removing wigs and gowns to make them less intimidating to children; using screens in the courtroom or video links; or giving pre-recorded video evidence.

They might also be offered a pre-trial visit so that they get used to how the court looks. There are also powers to provide life-long anonymity to witnesses and victims under 18 years at the time of the court appearance

Hearings involving sexual offences against children may be conducted in private or without the press or public present, where the court believes that this is needed to provide best evidence. However, there is no automatic right to a closed hearing and decisions on this will be made on an individual basis.

**Find more information about witness and victim support:**  
[cps.gov.uk/publication/code-crown-prosecutors](https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/code-crown-prosecutors)

## What does 'sentencing' mean?

Once a defendant has been convicted of an offence in court by pleading guilty or after being found guilty following a trial, the magistrate or judge will consider what sentence to give, based on set guidelines.

### Find out more about sentencing guidelines:

[sentencingcouncil.org.uk/offences](https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/offences)

Sentences might include the defendant:

- being sent to prison
- receiving a suspended prison sentence
- receiving a community sentence, such as rehabilitation, community service or carrying out specific activities
- being prevented from entering certain areas or from contacting particular people.

If the defendant receives a prison sentence of more than 12 months, you and your child should be offered contact with the probation Victim Contact Scheme, which will keep you updated and give you the opportunity to express your views about any victim-related conditions that could be placed on the defendant on their release from prison.

All defendants who plead guilty or are found guilty of a sexual offence against a child, including those given a caution by the police or receiving any court sentence, will be placed on the sex offenders register. The length of time on the register is determined by their sentence.

## Why was there no prosecution?

The CPS might decide not to charge a suspect, or not to continue a case, if they think there isn't enough evidence. Victims have the right to request a review of this decision under the Victims' Right to Review scheme.

### Find out more about the Victims' Right to Review scheme:

[victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/your-rights/victims-code](https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/your-rights/victims-code)

Next ▶

# Help and support



## Where can I find help and support for my child and myself?

**Stop It Now!**

UK &amp; IRELAND

Helping prevent  
child sexual abuse

### Stop It Now! UK and Ireland helpline

The confidential Stop It Now! helpline supports anyone with a concern about preventing child sexual abuse. Their experienced advisors will listen and help you work out the best steps for you and your child to take. If you're not ready to speak to someone, you can use their live chat and secure message service.

**Call 0808 1000 900 or visit [stopitnow.org.uk/helpline](https://stopitnow.org.uk/helpline)**

**Parents Protect**Together we can prevent  
child sexual abuse

### Parents Protect

The Parent Protect website has advice and information help parents and carers keep children safe, including information about family safety plans and how to support children who disclose abuse.

**Visit [parentsprotect.co.uk](https://parentsprotect.co.uk)**

Next ▶

## NSPCC Cymru

NSPCC Cymru offer support for children who have been, or are at risk of, sexual abuse and grooming. They have centres in Swansea, Cardiff and Prestatyn.

### Find out more:

[nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/our-services/childrens-services](https://nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/our-services/childrens-services)

[nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/our-services/nspcc-service-centres](https://nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/our-services/nspcc-service-centres)

## Victim Support

Victim Support helps victims of crime - the police should refer you to their services when you make a police report, but you can also self-refer to them. Their specially trained volunteers can also support parents and carers so that you can help your child through the criminal justice process. They can also provide details of other local support services to you: [victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/your-rights/victims-code](https://victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/your-rights/victims-code)

### Victim Help Centre North Wales

**0300 30 30 159**

### South Wales Victim Focus

**0300 303 0161**

### Connect Gwent

**0300 123 2133**

### Dyfed-Powys Citizens Advice Witness Service

**0300 3321 000**

### Contact Victim's Right to Review using Victim Liaison

[Cymru-Wales@cps.gov.uk](mailto:Cymru-Wales@cps.gov.uk)

### Or you can call the Victim's Right to Review team

**02920 803966**

## PACE

Parents Against Child Exploitation (PACE) works with parents and carers of children who are, or at risk of, sexual exploitation. You can call them for confidential help and advice on 0113 240 5226 or use their contact form on their website:

[paceuk.info/about-pace/contact-us](https://paceuk.info/about-pace/contact-us)

## Citizen's Advice Bureau

Citizen's Advice Bureau can offer a range of advice and support regarding a range of issues. You can find out more about their services by visiting:

[citizensadvice.org.uk/wales](https://citizensadvice.org.uk/wales)

Next ▶

## Reporting crimes to the police

### Dyfed Powys Police

[dyfed-powys.police.uk/en/contact-us/report-an-incident2](https://dyfed-powys.police.uk/en/contact-us/report-an-incident2)

### Gwent Police

[gwent.police.uk/ro/report/ocr/af/how-to-report-a-crime](https://gwent.police.uk/ro/report/ocr/af/how-to-report-a-crime)

### North Wales Police

[north-wales.police.uk/contact](https://north-wales.police.uk/contact)

### South Wales Police

[digitalservices.south-wales.police.uk/en/online-crime-reporting-english](https://digitalservices.south-wales.police.uk/en/online-crime-reporting-english)

### Sentencing Council

[sentencingcouncil.org.uk/updates/magistrates-court/item/either-way-sexual-offences-new-to-the-mcsg](https://sentencingcouncil.org.uk/updates/magistrates-court/item/either-way-sexual-offences-new-to-the-mcsg)  
[sentencingcouncil.org.uk/offences](https://sentencingcouncil.org.uk/offences)

## Finding and contacting your local social services

### Social Services

[wales.nhs.uk/LocalServices/?s=SocialService](https://wales.nhs.uk/LocalServices/?s=SocialService)



## For more information please contact:

### Stop It Now! Cymru

c/o NSPCC Cymru Wales, Diane Engelhardt House,  
(Unit 2) Treglown Court, Dowlais Road, Cardiff, CF24 5LQ

**Confidential helpline: 0808 1000 900**

[stopitnow.org.uk/wales](http://stopitnow.org.uk/wales)

[parentsprotect.co.uk](http://parentsprotect.co.uk)

[lucyfaithfull.org.uk](http://lucyfaithfull.org.uk)

 [facebook.com/stopitnowUKandireland](https://facebook.com/stopitnowUKandireland)

 [@StopItNowWales](https://twitter.com/StopItNowWales)

 [The Lucy Faithfull Foundation](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-lucy-faithfull-foundation)

 [wales@stopitnow.org.uk](mailto:wales@stopitnow.org.uk)



Ariennir gan  
**Lywodraeth Cymru**  
Funded by  
**Welsh Government**

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation is a registered Charity No. 1013025, and is a company limited by guarantee. Registered in England No. 2729957. Registered office: 2 Birch House, Harris Business Park, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove, B60 4DJ.

Important note: The photographic content within this document is for illustrative purposes only. All persons featured are models @ iStock and Shutterstock.

**THE  
LUCY FAITHFULL  
FOUNDATION**

Working to protect children