



Understanding Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse

This resource is to support multi-agency professionals in Hillingdon in developing a better understanding of those who perpetrate child sexual abuse. This resource offers some basic information but is not exhaustive. Professionals are encouraged to engage in further learning, training, and development to enhance their knowledge, challenge assumptions, and strengthen safeguarding practices.

Understanding Perpetrators

Understanding why someone perpetrates child sexual abuse (CSA) is complex and challenging for professionals, as it often conflicts with our moral beliefs and assumptions about human behaviour. Perpetrators come from all walks of life, and their motivations, tactics, and justifications can vary, making it difficult to identify and intervene effectively. This discomfort can sometimes lead to gaps in professional curiosity, risk assessment, and intervention. However, as multi-agency professionals, we have a shared duty to learn about the behaviours that may be a manipulative tactic of perpetrators, challenge misconceptions, and strengthen our collective response. By developing a deeper understanding, we can enhance safeguarding practices, disrupt offending, and provide better protection for children.

What Do We Know About Perpetrators of CSA

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is usually committed by individuals who seek to exert power, control, and manipulate vulnerable children for their own sexual gratification, exploitation or gain. The motivations behind CSA can vary, but they may involve deep-seated psychological issues or a desire for dominance, often showing a lack of empathy for the victim.

Many perpetrators groom their victims by gaining their trust, creating an emotional bond, and gradually introducing inappropriate behaviours. This manipulation often isolates the victim, making it harder for them to seek help or recognise the abuse. The act of committing CSA can be driven by a sense of entitlement or a belief that the victim is somehow responsible or deserving of the abuse.

Other Perpetrators of CSA

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is not limited to physical contact. It includes grooming, online exploitation, and the production and distribution of explicit material. Victims can experience emotional and psychological abuse, often without direct physical interaction. Grooming, for example, manipulates a child's trust for sexual exploitation, while online abuse can occur through digital platforms. CSA offences can also involve the possession and sharing of explicit content, which perpetuates harm.

Professionals must recognise the full range of CSA to ensure effective prevention, identification, and response for all victims.

REMEMBER

The following areas that also fall under perpetrating CSA

Grooming



Consuming



Creating



Networking

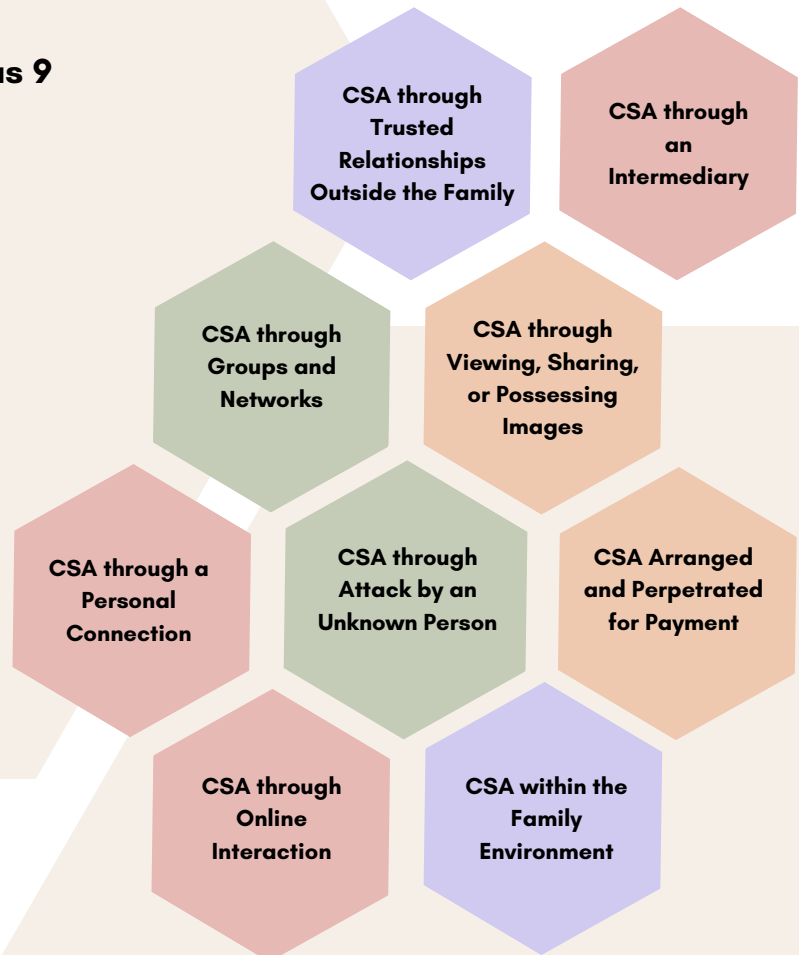
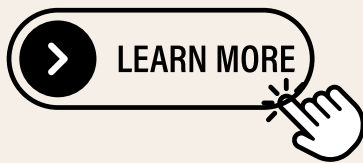


Click on the icons for more information

Professional Categories of CSA Perpetrated

Using precise terminology when referring to perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is essential for ensuring consistency across multi-agency practice. Clear and accurate language supports effective information sharing, reduces the risk of misinterpretation, and ensures accountability remains with the perpetrator. Consistency in how professionals record and communicate about perpetrators strengthens risk assessments, legal processes, and safeguarding interventions. It also prevents language that could minimise harm or obscure the nature of offences

The CSA Centre for Expertise has 9 categories CSA



1 Child sexual abuse within the family environment.

Abuse by an adult family member or someone connected to the family

2 Child sexual abuse through an intermediary

Abuse facilitated by a second perpetrator who grants access to the child, often under coercion or manipulation.

3 CSA through online interaction

Perpetrators coerce or deceive a child into sexualised conversations, acts, or sharing explicit images.

4 CSA through viewing or sharing images

Involves viewing, possessing, or distributing CSA images, typically online.

5 CSA by an unknown attacker

Sexual assault by a stranger without prior contact or grooming.

6 Child sexual abuse through trusted relationships outside the family environment.

Abuse by someone in a position of authority, including institutions and community settings, in the UK or overseas.

7 CSA through groups and networks

Abuse facilitated within social groups, gangs, or online networks, often involving planned or escalating offences.

8 CSA for payment

Abuse where a perpetrator profits by selling access to a child for contact abuse or explicit imagery.

9 CSA through a personal connection

Abuse by someone who grooms or coerces the child into sexual activity.

The Offense Process Model

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse do not offend overnight; their actions result from a series of conscious decisions. Offending typically follows a process where deviant thoughts are reinforced through justifications and grooming, both of the child and their environment. While risk factors may influence this pathway, offending is ultimately an active choice to cross moral, legal, and social boundaries.

01

Initial Thoughts or Fantasies: The individual begins to experience sexually deviant thoughts or fantasies, which they may initially recognise as inappropriate or harmful.

02

Cognitive Distortions: Over time, they may justify or normalise these thoughts through distorted thinking patterns, such as believing "the child is mature for their age" or "it's not harmful if the child doesn't resist."

03

Planning and Grooming: The individual progresses to actively planning and grooming—manipulating both the environment and the potential victim to create opportunities for abuse.

04

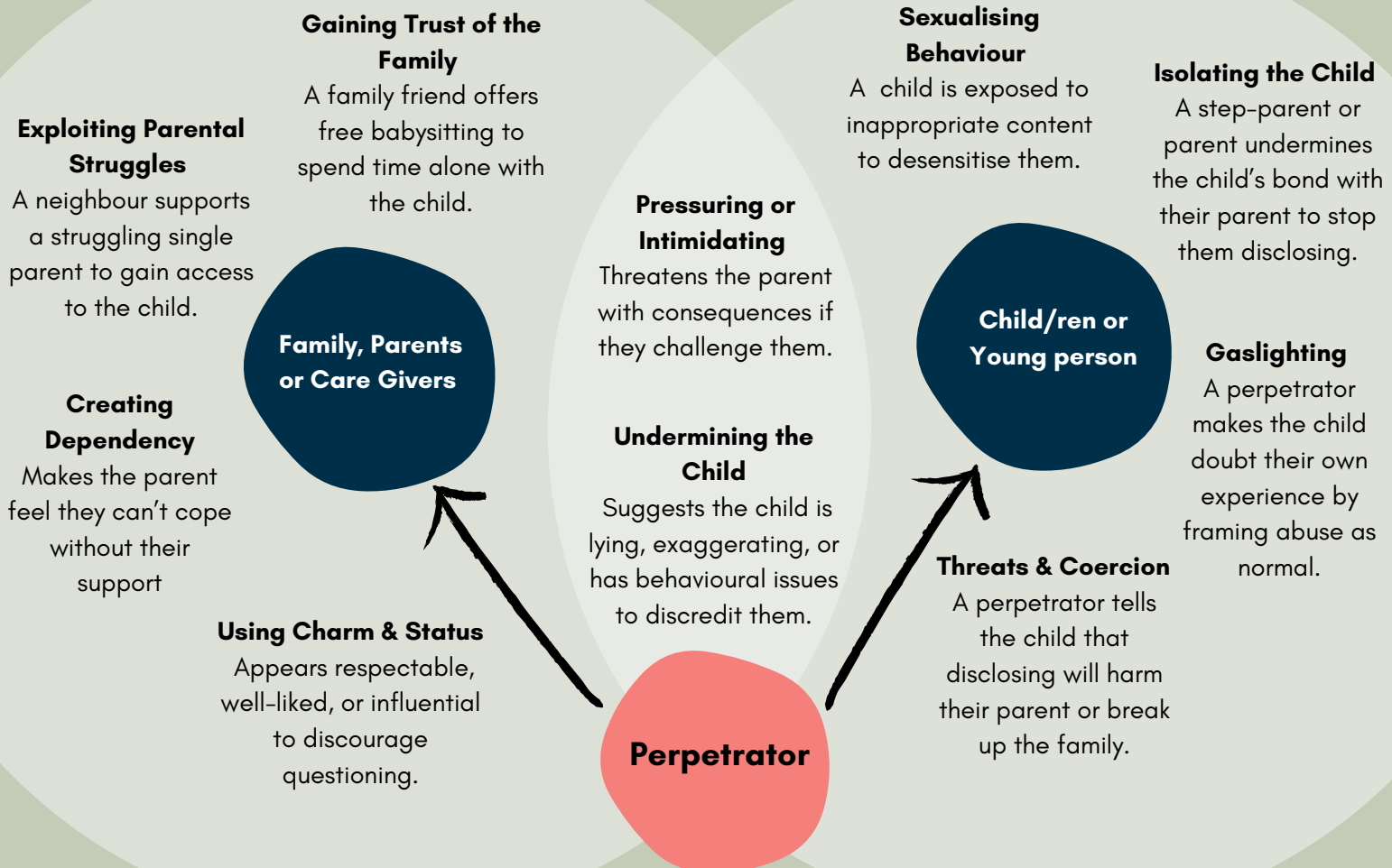
Offending: The abusive behaviour is carried out. This stage is often accompanied by emotional detachment or reinforced cognitive distortions to minimise feelings of guilt or accountability.

05

Post-Offence Response: After the offence, the individual may experience feelings of guilt, attempt to rationalise or justify their actions, or continue the cycle of abuse if interventions are not put in place.

The Offence Process Model (Ward & Hudson, 1998)

How Perpetrators of CSA May Manipulate



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT



What information do you have about the suspected perpetrator?

Is there risk of manipulation and grooming towards professionals

Have you shared all information with other agencies?

Consider language by the suspected perpetrator, is there justification and normalisation

Has charm, status, or professional background been used to discredit concerns

Using language "educational" or "harmless." Or portraying themselves as a victim

Consider if there have been threats, intimidation, or emotional manipulation

Consider if safeguarding measures might be ignored, and how this will be managed

How often will you review the risk with other agencies?

Have you established a safety plan?

Have you shared clear safeguarding measures for the child and others from your agency?

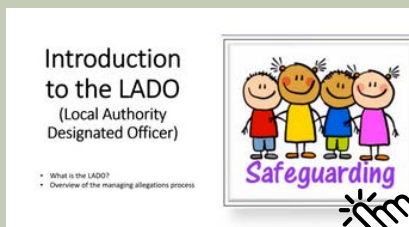
Have you identified clear restrictions for your agency for the perpetrator, based on the information you know.

Resources and Links to Support Practice



LUCY FAITHFULL FOUNDATION Family Safety Plan - This plan will help you put safety measures in place to respond to any concerns and potential risks relating to child sexual abuse.

Stop it Now, from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation provide advice, support, and online self-help resources for people concerned about their thoughts and behaviour towards children, whether online or offline.



Click for **LADO guidance** outlines procedures for managing allegations against people who work with children. This includes all paid, unpaid, volunteers, casual, agency or anyone self-employed who works with children including foster carers and prospective adopters, as well as 16 & 17 year olds placed in a position of trust. Alternatively click above to watch the 'Introduction to the LADO webinar'.



Information Sharing Briefing
Good information sharing is fundamental to effective safeguarding practice. Click on the icon to learn more



Key messages from research on child sexual abuse perpetrated by adults