

The Nature and Impact of Child Sexual Abuse

Pan Dorset Safeguarding
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Aims and Objectives

- **Enhance awareness of child sexual abuse and its impact**
- **Range of child sexual abuse -**
Intergenerational child sexual abuse, intrafamilial, extra familial
- **Peer-on Peer sexual abuse – sibling sexual abuse**
- **Identify typical and atypical sexual development in children**
- **Identify sexual harmful behaviour Interventions**
- **Impact of child sexual abuse –**
attachment, dissociation, shame...
- **Prevention –** sex education, family awareness, talking to children about sex



Range of Child Sexual Abuse

- **Intra familial – intergenerational**
- **Extra familial**
- **Child sexual exploitation**
- **Institutions** – boarding schools, scouts, sports, children's homes, youth offending units
- **Faith Communities**
- **Peer or Peer sexual abuse** – gangs, school, harmful sexual behaviour
- **Technology-Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviour (TA-HSB)**
- **Sibling Sexual abuse**



Technology-Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviour (TA-HSB)

- **Link between on-line behaviour and harmful sexual behaviour**
- **Range from developmentally inappropriate use of pornography (and exposing other children to this), through to grooming and sexual harassment**
- **On-line behaviour may be a trigger for sexual abuse and the long-term effect of exposure to pornography can affect the ability to build healthy sexual relationships**
- **Engaging in sexual discussions or acts, image-creating/sharing or communication which is inappropriate and/or harmful due age or stage of development (NSPCC)**



Sexual Violence in Children

- **One third of child sexual abuse is committed by children**
- **Peer-on-peer sexual exploitation** – sexual bullying, sexual harassment, enticement, rape and gang rape
- **Social media** - sexting, posting sexual images, revenge porn, sextortion, upskirting...
- **Sexual violence and rape in gang culture** - 'sexual line-up's', 'links', initiation rites
- **Looked after children** – boarding school, sexualised proximity/attachment seeking, foster care, adopted
- **Sibling sexual abuse** – biological, blended siblings, foster siblings, cousins



Nature of Sibling Sexual Abuse (SSA)

- **Under-reported**
- **Least recognized form of CSA** -proximity, opportunity, low threat detection, poorly understood
- **Estimated 3-5 times the rate of intergenerational CSA**
- **Characterised by secrecy and shame**
- **Can happen in any family**
- **Siblings** - stepsiblings, half siblings, foster siblings, adopted siblings, cousins
- **Normalisation**
- **Older or stronger sibling** - coerces a younger, smaller, less strong sibling
- **Power** – authority, status, privilege, in loco parentis, favoured child
- **Anger and jealousy**
- McCartan, K., Anning, A. and Qureshi, E. (2021) The impact of sibling sexual abuse on adults who were harmed as children UWE, Bristol Research Report



Spectrum of Motivation in Sibling Sexual Abuse

- **Curiosity**
- **Comfort** – cuddling, touching, stroking, licking
- **Sexual experimentation**
- **Sexual gratification** – masturbation, mutual masturbation
- **Corruption of innocence**
- **Re-enactment of own sexual abuse** - mastery, 'triumph over trauma' , defence against shame
- **Conditioning of sexual arousal to aggression** – learned response
- **Anger and rage** – retaliation, symbolic way of punishing and annihilating sibling
- **Assertion of power and control** – domination, display of power and strength to assuage own powerlessness
- **Relational Trauma**
- **Conduct disorders or severe learning difficulties**



Definition of Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)

- **Developmentally inappropriate sexual, or sexualised behaviour displayed by children and young people - harmful or abusive**
- **Inappropriate for age or stage of development (Hackett, 2004)**
- **Range from using sexually explicit words and phrases to full penetrative sex with other children or adults (Rich, 2011).**
- **Displayed towards younger children, peers, older children or adults, and is harmful to the children and young people who display it, as well as the people it is directed towards**



Continuum of children and young people’s sexual behaviour (Hackett, 2010)

Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
Developmentally expected Socially acceptable Consensual, mutual, reciprocal Shared decision-making	Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour	Problematic and concerning behaviours	Victimising intent or outcome	Physically violent sexual abuse Highly intrusive Instrumental violence which is physiologically and/or sexually arousing to the perpetrator Sadism
			Includes misuse of power	
	Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group	Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected	Coercion and force to ensure victim compliance	
			Intrusive	
	Context for behaviour may be inappropriate	No overt elements of victimisation		
	Generally consensual and reciprocal	Consent issues may be unclear	Informed consent lacking or not able to be freely given by victim	
		May lack reciprocity or equal power		
		May include levels of compulsivity	May include elements of	
		© Christian and Schelderson 2022		

Developmentally Appropriate Sexual Behaviours - 0-18

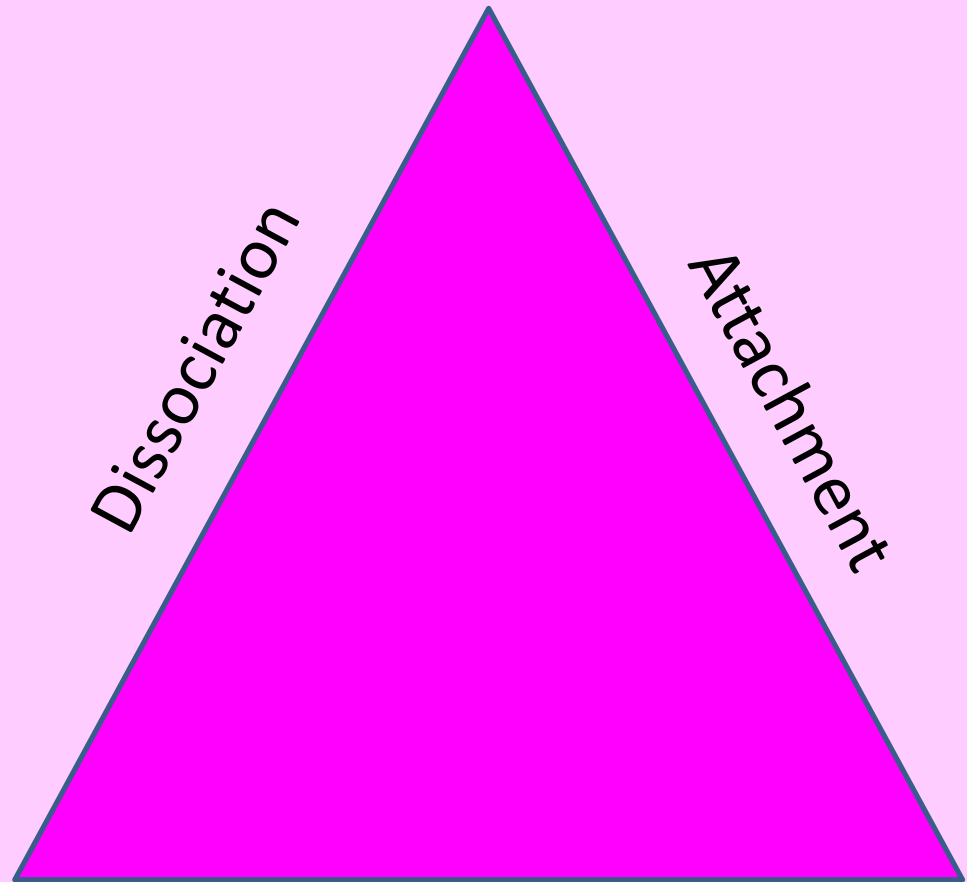
Age group	Developmentally appropriate sexual behaviours
0-5 Years of age	- Engaging in exploratory touch - Mutual and consensual - Looking at themselves and others - Simulation of sex – playing ‘mummies and daddies’ - Fun – game, affectionate
6-10 Years of age	- Playing games as a form of sexual exploration (playing doctors) - Telling dirty jokes - Using dirty words - Showing interest in changes in their bodies
11 to 18 Years of age	- Peer related sexual activity - Sexual activity with same gender - Masturbation

Developmentally Inappropriate sexual behaviours 0-18

Age group	Developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviours
0-5 Years of age	Curiosity about sexual behaviour becomes an obsessive preoccupation Exploration becomes re-enactment of specific adult activity Behaviour involves injury to self and other Children's behaviour involves coercion, threats, secrecy, violence and aggression, control, domination, humiliation
6-10 Years of age	Sexual penetration Genital kissing Oral copulation Simulated intercourse
11-12 Years of age	Any sexual play which involves children younger than themselves. Control, coercion, domination, humiliation
13-18 Years of age	Compulsive masturbation Attempt to touch or expose other's genitals - especially without permission Sexual contact with animals and younger children Using sexual themes to degrade others or themselves Chronic preoccupation with sex and pornography

Childhood Sexual Abuse and Complex Trauma

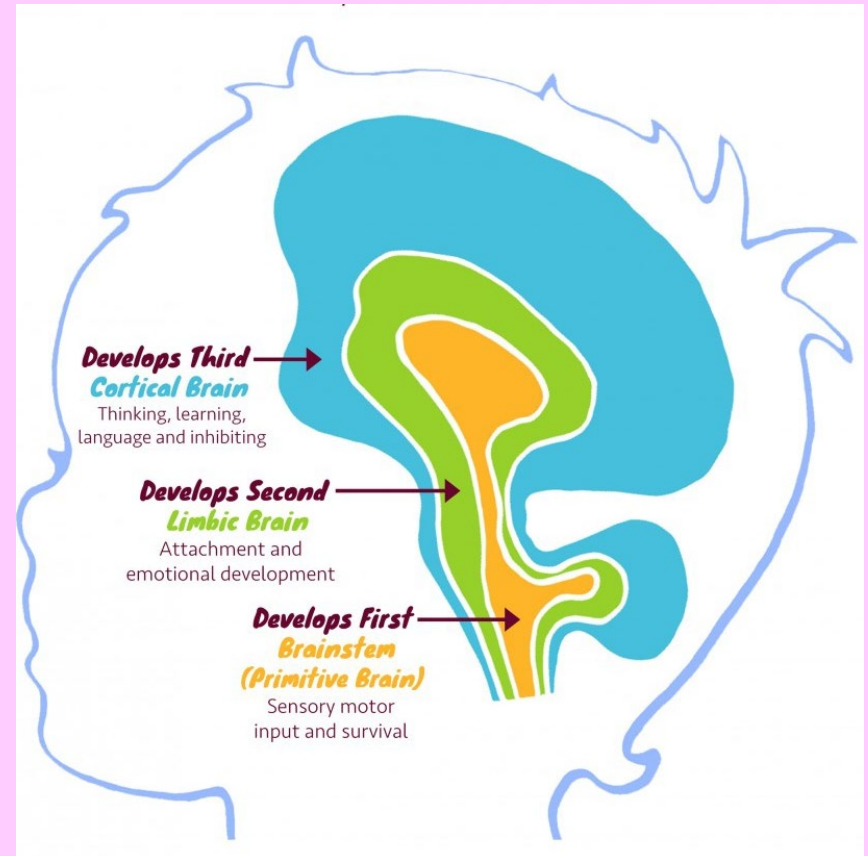
- **Psycho-biological survival system** – activates cascade of neuro-chemicals outside of conscious control
- **Hyperaroused or hypoaroused** - hyper-vigilant or shut down
- **Toxic Stress**
- **Trauma reactions remain 'on-line'** - interpret the world as dangerous
- **Developmental Trauma Disorder** – Van der Kolk (2009)
- **PTSD and Complex PTSD**
- **Dissociation** – deleting the body, impact on somatosensory system, self awareness
- **Traumatic Attachment**
- **Enduring personality changes due to prolonged coercive control** (Herman, 1992)
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)** Felitti et al 1998)



Trauma

Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse

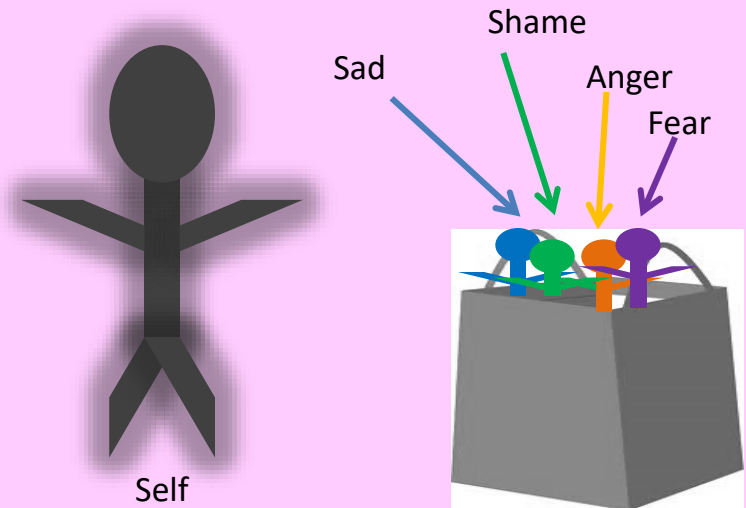
- **Barriers to disclosure** – shame, secrecy and silence, fear of consequences
- **Developmental Trauma**
- **Fear, confusion, trauma reactions**
- **Emotional dysregulation**
- **Dissociation**
- **Shame**
- **Compliant and submissive**
- **Anger, aggressive or destructive behaviour**
- **Sexual acting out** – sexually harmful behaviour to other children, pets
- **Withdrawal** - friendships and activities
- Impaired executive functioning
- **Pregnancy – STI's**
- **Self Harm and Addictions**
- **Adaptation of personality**



Dissociation

- **Default response to trauma cues**
- **Initially transitory** - can become chronic, recurrent , or addictive
- **Emotional Numbing / Affective Shutdown** - being *emotionless*
- **Compartmentalisation of emotions**
- **Depersonalisation** - *'it isn't me*
- **Derealisation** - – confusion and disorientation – time
- **Numbing or 'deleting the body'** – living in the head, lack of embodiment
- **Identity confusion** - speaking in different voices with different ages, feeling as if they are losing control to 'someone else' inside them, acting like different people from moment to moment, feeling as if there are different people inside them
- **Somatisation**
- **Need for intense stimulation to penetrate dissociative state** - self harm, compulsions, violence, sexual violence

Emotions



Lanius, 2019

How to spot dissociation

- **Unable to do tasks and follow instructions**
- **Glazed look in eyes or blanking out** – daydream, zoning out, pseudo-seizure)
- **Extreme mood change without obvious triggers** – safe/calm, frightened/angry or sad
- **Extreme behavioural or appearance changes without obvious triggers** – voice, dress, handwriting, hair, facial expression
- **Regressed behaviour** – voice, language, behaviour
- **Memory loss** – things said, done, skills
- **Denial of misdemeanours**
- **Saying 'we' or 'they'** – 'we or they don't like that'
- **Switching** – eyes roll or flutter
- **Distracted by internal voices**
- **Self-harm**
- **History of unexplained medical illnesses**



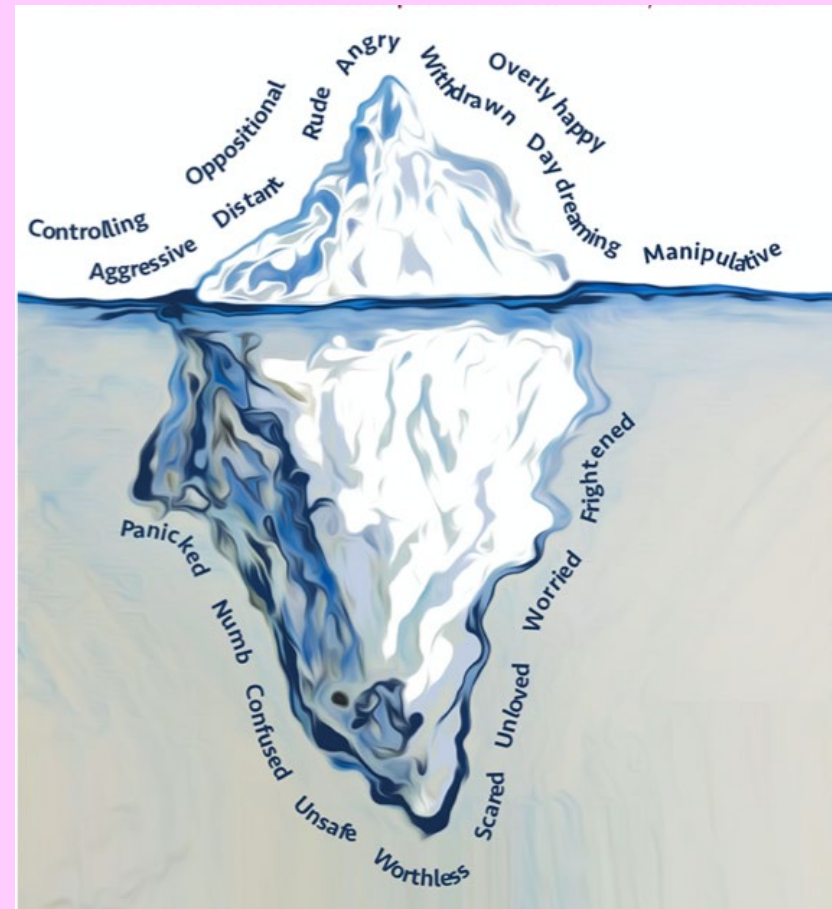
Impact on Attachment

- **Trauma Bond**
- **Relationships seen as source of danger and distress not comfort**
- **Dissociation** - disavowal and suppression of feelings
- **Impaired mentalisation, metacognition and reflective functioning**
- **Epistemic mistrust** – new information seen as untrustworthy, not able to integrate, inflexible thinking patterns
- **Mind reading**
- **Volatile and unstable and relationships** – submission/control, attack/comply, approach/avoid
- **Impaired social interactions**
- **Inability to express needs** - manipulative and deceptive behaviour
- **Self-harming and suicidal behaviours**
- **Lack of attachment security** -- fearful dependency or avoidance, disorganised attachment styles



Staying under the Radar

- Blending in
- Don't try at all or make excuses so don't know what they are doing
- Go along with people or ideas when they it is not good for them
- Change who they are depending who they are with
- Tell people 'I can do it myself'
- Never tell anybody about how they feel
- Never show their anger or sadness
- Stay smiley, bright and bubbly
- Tell people they are fine even though they know they are not
- Wear lots of make up as a mask
- Never ask for help
- Just get on with things even though they don't know what they are doing
- Conform and comply



What can we do?

- **Understand what might be happening for the child**
- **Respond to 'hidden' needs rather than the behaviour**
- **Empathy, attunement, mirroring, acceptance, understanding**
- **'Hold' them rather than punish or shame them**
- **Be genuinely caring and present**
- **Be explicit**
- **Compassion and kindness**
- **Build authentic pride**
- **Support help and educate parents – do not judge or shame them**
- **Help them to develop a secure attachment style**
- **Re-regulation of emotions – grounding skills for all senses, mood basket, or calm bag, cookie jar, matryoshka dolls.....**



Top tips

- **Ground the child back to the 'here and now' and help them to feel safe** – co-regulate, breathe, bow bubbles, blow up a balloon
- **Use eye contact**
- **Use a calm, low, slow voice**
- **Use their name, remind them that they are safe and where they are**
- **Use gentle, simple grounding questions** - *'can you tell me where you are? What is your name? How old are you?'*
- **Connect through playing ball, ball of wool** – (Use gentle touch hand on hand) if appropriate
- **Use smell, music, image** - sing, recite a poem, tangle toy
- **Give them something to eat or chew, or drink**
- **Movement** – clap together, stand up, walk around, star jump, throw a cushion or stress ball to and fro
- **Ask them questions about their surroundings** – *'what can you see? What can you hear? What can you smell?'*
- **Take them outside and walk on the grass** – preferably in bare feet
- **If there is a pet, ask them to stroke it** – or soft toy
- **Have a blanket nearby**
- **Teens - grounding texts** *'Send a photo of something that made you laugh, or a colour...'*



How to Protect Children from Sexual Abuse

- **Listen to and believe the child**
- **Open communication of feelings and problems**
- **Empower them to say 'No' and express feelings and needs**
- **Make sure they access accurate information –** not just from friends, peers, social media, internet, pornography, advertising, films, TV, radio, songs, lyrics, celebrities...
- **Answer their questions –** reduce confusion, guidance
- **Monitor what children watch on TV and their devices**
- **Provide good supervision**
- **Distinguish between and discuss good and bad touch**
- **Discuss rights and responsibilities of child**
- **Specify appropriate ways of acting**
- **Non-intrusive monitoring of boundaries between siblings**
- **Involve families where possible**



Conclusion

- Awareness of the range child sexual abuse especially sibling sexual abuse
- Understand the impact of CSA especially dissociation and shame
- Need to understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviour
- Be able to communicate openly when talking about sex and overcome own inhibitions
- If you can talk to them you can empower them to navigate their sexual landscape and keep them safe



Websites and Further Reading

- www.pods-online.org.uk
- www.isst-d.org
International society for the study of trauma and dissociation
- www.estd.org European society for trauma and dissociation
- www.childtrauma.org Dr Bruce Perry's research about developmental trauma
- de Thierry (2020) The Simple Guide to Complex Trauma and Dissociation: What it is and how to help. London, Jessica Kingsley Publisher
- Silberg J (2012) The Child Survivor: Healing Developmental Trauma and Dissociation Londn, Routledge
- Struik A 2019 2nd edition Treating Chronically Traumatized Children: Don't let sleeping dogs lie method London, Routledge
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