

7 Minute Briefing

CSAFE: Supporting the Non-Abusive Parent/Carer

1 | What is CSAFE – and why does it matter?

CSAFE – Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment – refers to sexual abuse that takes place within a child's family or trusted network. This includes abuse by parents, siblings, extended family members, carers, or a parent's partner.

CSAFE may sit alongside neglect, domestic abuse, emotional harm and other family difficulties. Children may not tell anyone about what is happening, so professionals must consider behaviour, presentation, family history and information held across agencies.

Think: Could the presenting concern be obscuring indicators of sexual abuse?

This was particularly important in the audit, which found that neglect and CSAFE indicators could coexist and that neglect should not dilute professional analysis of sexual abuse risk.



2 | What did our audit tell us?

The partnership undertook two multi-agency audits involving families where there were concerns about CSAFE. The audits explored not only how agencies identified and managed risk, but also how effectively the non-abusive parent was supported to protect their child. Both multi-agency audits were graded **Requires Improvement**.

There were strengths, including trusted relationships and direct work within education, effective information sharing, child-centred police activity and, in one audit, strong birth planning and regular unannounced visits. However, a consistent message emerged:

When CSAFE indicators are present, the professional network needs to mobilise early.

The audit identified the need for earlier assessment of the person posing risk and the protective capacity of the non-abusive parent/carers, stronger testing of Safety Plans, more opportunities for children to be seen and heard, and continued safeguarding action where a criminal investigation does not progress.

Think: Are we waiting for certainty when the information we already hold requires protective action?

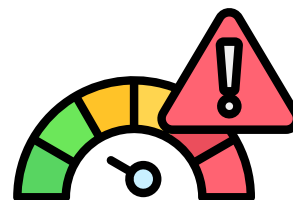


3 | Assess protection – don't assume it

A parent/carer who has not directly caused the harm should not automatically be assumed able to protect their child.

They may be experiencing **shock, disbelief, isolation, coercion, dependency or pressure from family members**. A protective adult assessment needs to explore more than whether someone says they will follow a Safety Plan. Assessments should explore whether they:

- understand and believe the risk to be a real possibility;
- can prioritise the child's safety;
- can maintain boundaries with the person posing risk; and
- have the practical and emotional resources to sustain protection.



The audit identified the need for earlier and more robust protective adult assessments.

REMEMBER



4 | Supporting the parent helps safeguard the child

Supporting the non-abusive parent/carer is part of the safeguarding intervention, not something separate from it.

Consider what might make protection difficult. Does the parent rely on the person posing risk or their family for housing, money, childcare, transport, companionship or emotional support? Are there concerns of, or a history of domestic abuse, as this may also significantly compromise the parent's capacity to protect?

Practical and emotional support can reduce this dependency and strengthen the parent's ability to protect. This is particularly important where a parent is socially isolated – a key learning identified within the audit.

5 | Listen beyond disclosure



“Children experiencing sexual abuse may communicate through:

behaviour • sexualised behaviour or language • fear • withdrawal • emotional changes • physical symptoms • indirect or fragmented accounts

They may also minimise or retract something they have previously said.

In the audit, trusted and consistent direct work within education enabled a child to communicate an unsafe experience. This demonstrated the importance of giving children repeated, safe opportunities to be seen, heard and understood.”



The absence of a clear or repeated disclosure does not mean the absence of risk.

6 | Test the Safety Plan

A Safety Plan is only effective if professionals know that it is working in the child's everyday life. Be clear about:

Who can have contact? • Who supervises? • What are the boundaries? • What happens if they are breached? • Who checks that the plan is being followed?

The audit found stronger practice where unannounced visits were used to test adherence to the Safety Plan. It also highlighted the importance of ensuring Child Protection, PLO and other safeguarding actions form one coherent plan understood by the whole professional network.

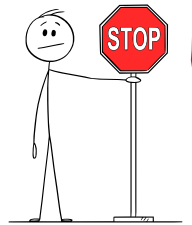


Don't just record the Safety Plan – test it.

7 | No Further Police Action does NOT mean No Further Safeguarding Action

A criminal investigation and safeguarding assessment operate to different thresholds. Where a criminal investigation results in no further police action, professionals must continue to consider the child's safety where concerns remain and ask:

What risk remains? • Does the Safety Plan remain effective? • Do assessments need updating? • Are other children at risk? • Are other protective or civil safeguarding options required?



The audit highlighted the importance of saying “***no further police action***” rather than simply “*no further action*”, so that the continuing safeguarding responsibility remains clear. It also identified the need to consider wider protective measures, including civil options such as **Sexual Risk Orders (SRO's)** where appropriate, when risk remains despite the conclusion of criminal proceedings.



Practice Spotlight: Health



Across both audits, health services demonstrated the value of robust safeguarding systems, including the use of electronic safeguarding alerts, multidisciplinary communication and timely information sharing. These approaches helped ensure that safeguarding concerns remained visible whenever children or family members accessed healthcare services, reinforcing that every professional contact is an opportunity to identify risk and promote children's safety.

- 1. CHILD** — What is the child communicating through their words, behaviour and presentation?
- 2. PARENT/CARER** — Have we assessed their protective capacity, or assumed it because they are not the person alleged to have caused harm?
- 3. SUPPORT** — What practical or emotional support does the parent/carer need to sustain protection?
- 4. PERSON POSING RISK** — Do we understand their history, access to children, relationships and opportunities to cause harm?
- 5. FAMILY NETWORK** — Who else has influence or caring responsibilities, and have we assessed their understanding of risk?
- 6. SAFETY PLAN** — How do we know the arrangements are actually being followed when professionals are not present?
- 7. MULTI-AGENCY NETWORK** — Are we sharing the information we each hold, using clear language and confidently challenging delay or drift?



You do not need to be a child sexual abuse specialist to notice concerns, listen to a child, share information or take safeguarding action. Use your agency's safeguarding procedures, seek advice from your safeguarding lead and work with the multi-agency network when you are concerned about a child's safety.



Further Learning

The **CSA Centre** (www.csacentre.org.uk) Practice Resources Hub brings together free resources designed to improve practitioners' knowledge, confidence and skills in identifying and responding to child sexual abuse. The CSA Centre also provides specialist training on working with non-abusing parents and carers, specifically covering assessment, engagement and intervention with families affected by child sexual abuse.



Local support services can also be found at: -

<https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk/document/sexual-assault-or-abuse-support-leaflet/>

Free multi-agency eLearning on the topic of CSAFE can be found here: -

<https://staffscp.event-booking.org.uk/elearning-detail/%3DETO3MzM/STOKE-ON-TRENT-FREE-Intra-familial-Child-Sexual-Abuse-eLearning>

Free Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) workshops can also be booked via the **Stoke Safeguarding Children Partnership** website - workshops are currently available for **Tuesday 15th September 2026**, **Wednesday 2nd December 2026** and **Thursday 18th March 2027**.