

I WANTED THEM ALL TO NOTICE

In Nov 2024, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published “[I wanted them all to notice](#)”, a national review exploring the challenges that feature in the identification, assessment and response to child sexual abuse (CSA) **within the family environment**. This briefing from the Lambeth SCP summarises the key findings.

What is intrafamilial child sexual abuse? Sexual abuse by a relative (e.g. a parent, stepparent, sibling or grandparent) OR those closely linked to the family (e.g. a parent’s partner or someone with caring responsibilities). It is estimated at least 500,000 children in England & Wales are sexually abused each year.

Finding 1: children’s voices weren’t always heard and their needs not understood

- There was an over-reliance on children to disclose and a belief children needed to make the approach
- Uncertainties about what can/can’t be said and fear of interfering with criminal investigations prevented practitioners from proactively talking to children about CSA concerns
- When considering why children were behaving the way they were, practitioners looked for causes in the child rather than CSA as a cause
- When children did tell someone, they were often disbelieved
- Retractions were taken at face value, without exploration, and as proof that CSA had not occurred
- Individual needs of children in relation to race, ethnicity and culture were often not considered

Finding 2: There was a lack of understanding of parents’ contexts and vulnerabilities

- Services placed undue responsibility on parents to protect their children from CSA without offering the support and information they need to do this
- A poor understanding of domestic abuse led to unrealistic expectations of parental ability to keep children safe and misinterpretation of behaviours as disguised compliance.
- Parental needs in relation to their race, ethnicity, culture, were not considered and there was a lack of exploration of parents’ own support needs, vulnerabilities and traumas
- Information was not shared about Sarah’s Law.
- Parents were not offered appropriate support to talk to and parent their children, or cope with what had happened.

Finding 3: there were challenges in identifying signs and understanding risks

- Practitioners across all agencies lacked an understanding of the signs and indicators of CSA and did not routinely identify or act on these signs
- There was a tendency to respond to signs and indicators in isolation, without seeing the wider context
- Stereotypes and assumptions around victims and abusers impacted on recognition
- There was confusion about the need for parental consent to intervene, creating missed opportunities
- Many perpetrators had a known history of sexual offending or were a known risk, but this information either wasn’t sought or analysed
- Where other forms of abuse and neglect were known to be occurring, practitioners lost sight of CSA
- There was insufficient information sharing and collaboration between agencies

Finding 4: There were issues in the response to intrafamilial CSA

- Once concerns were raised, there was often a lack of thorough investigation and effective action
- Referral agencies were often not informed of outcomes, or involved in strategy meetings
- There was evidence of multiple issues about the same concerns which failed to build a picture of cumulative concerns
- There was confusion about thresholds for action, and incorrect use of the criminal standard of proof being required before action could be taken
- There was over-reliance on outcomes of police investigations to substantiate abuse
- There was a lack of intervention with abusers to address their sexual thoughts & behaviours, and to disrupt further abuse through the use of civil orders

How can I strengthen my practice?

- Access [training](#) to help recognise signs of CSA and develop confidence to talk to children about CSA
- Access [training](#) to understand how behaviour can be a means of communicating trauma
- Access [training](#) to develop cultural competency and guard against harmful assumptions and biases
- Access [training](#) to develop understanding of domestic abuse
- Read the [guidance](#) on how to support family members to better understand and respond to children
- Raise awareness of [Sarah’s Law](#) and inform parents of their right to information
- Apply the safeguarding threshold of balance of probabilities, and explore reasons for retractions