

Handout - Complex abuse – Handout for staff annual update

Action for trainer prior to session: Are there any local cases of complex abuse which might be relevant? Are there any National cases you could discuss or cases which have gone to Serious Case Review (or National Review)?

Action, whole staff group: What is complex Abuse? Discuss with whole staff group.

Complex abuse is, by its very nature, a complicated area to describe and understand.

Since there is no defined or specific context, the complex abuse of children may also be referred to as 'organised' abuse – this refers to such situations as those where there may be a number of abusers and a number of children involved, perhaps over a long period of time.

Complex abuse can occur anywhere and often attracts media attention, especially where professionals in a setting have been involved in the abuse (see also Allegations Management handout).

However, complex abuse may also occur in families, between parents and children, siblings and the wider family. Sometimes the community is involved, e.g. Rochester and Rotherham.

Action – group or small group activity: How might we recognise Organisational abuse?

Using a real case you are aware of, or a scenario from below: Winterbourne Down. Ask staff to discuss how they might recognise Organisational abuse should it present itself.

Action – group or small group activity: What prevents people from coming forward to report Organisational abuse?

Each complex abuse case has different characteristics that determine the scale and complexity of the investigation, but it is beyond doubt that such abuse is profoundly traumatic for the children involved. Investigations are time-consuming and extremely demanding work for the agencies, requiring specialist skills from both police and social work staff. Some investigations become very complex because of the number of places and people involved and the timescale over which abuse is alleged to have occurred.

Interagency involvement

The very complexity of interagency investigations means that it can be difficult to respond in an established way. However, all approaches need to consider:

- The seriousness and extent of the alleged crimes/incidents.
- The number and nature of the victims.
- An assessment of the risk to victims and potential victims.
- The nature and circumstances of the alleged perpetrators (for example previous history, corporate body or individual).
- The actual or anticipated level of public interest and/or media interest.
- The potential for differences in organisational objectives, lack of capacity or gaps in powers to affect the investigation.

The seriousness of the issues outlined above suggest that any concerns from a practitioner should be reported to a line manager and must in turn trigger an immediate (same day) discussion between a senior local children's services manager and an equivalent manager from the area police force. Each case requires thorough strategic planning according to the Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures.

It is likely the meeting/discussion would:

- Analyse the known information.

- Identify what else needs to be known at this stage and how it might be found.
- Decide whether it is potentially a case of organised or complex abuse.
- If so, develop an outline plan for the investigation and identify resource implications.
- Consider any immediate protective actions.

The membership and management implications for the process come next, but all will be managed at senior level between the agencies involved.

Care and attention to the welfare needs of the child victims or adult survivors involved is equally paramount, and must also be provided and monitored.