



# SAFE SEEN SUPPORTED

How to reach and help children and young people experiencing abuse in their households



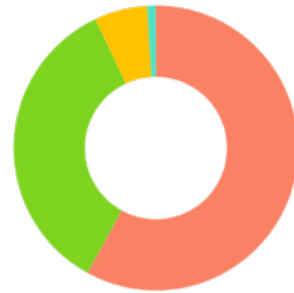
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# 71 people

took our survey

# 37 people

attended our roundtables



- Adult with lived experience (58%)
- Ally or professional (35%)
- Young person with lived experience (6%)
- Other / prefer not to say (1%)



- Survivor roundtable (32%)
- Practitioner roundtable (38%)
- Communications roundtable (30%)

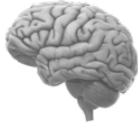
# FINDINGS

# Summary

- It is extremely hard for CYP experiencing abuse to reach out for help
- CYP experiencing violence/abuse at home are hidden in plain sight
- We need a global conversation so that everyone knows how to recognise and respond to abuse
- We need to create safe spaces: internal, relational physical/virtual
- We need to listen and know how to listen well
- We need to trust, empower, and support CYP to lead the way
- Healing is within reach and all survivors deserve this
- **PROTECTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY**

# Key themes

Our data analysis from the survey and roundtables highlighted four strong themes:



**1. The importance of awareness and education**



**2. The need for safe places and trust**



**3. The significance of children and young people being heard, in control, and supported**



**4. The barriers to disclosure**

# Key theme



## Education + awareness

**A better understanding of abuse – how to recognise it, how to talk about it, and what to do about it – is critical, both for children and young people and the wider community.**

- It is important that community members and professionals are taught how to recognise signs abuse
- CYP often know no other reality than the one they live in and do not recognise their experiences as abuse: they must be taught what abuse looks like and feels like
- Education helps both with practical information and with reassuring CYP that what is happening is not their fault, that nothing is wrong with them, and that their struggle is valid
- A wide range of language must be used as CYP do not identify with words such as 'abuse' or 'trauma'
- Awareness of survivors' stories is important for insight and hope
- Overall, training, education, and awareness-building are urgently needed

# Key theme



## Education + awareness

*"We need to make sure that every single adult knows what child abuse is and what the signs are so that if you need to, you can disclose to your neighbour or your local shop keeper and they would know what to do."*

*"One thing that would help is if at all these levels there was an awareness and understanding of the large scale nature of childhood violence/abuse at home and it's immediate and lasting impacts."*

*"If there had been any education around this at school, it would have helped. I was aware of things like Childline being available for kids, but as the abuse I was suffering was normalised at home, I didn't identify with the kids in the advert at all or see myself at risk."*

# Key theme 02



## Safe Places + Trust

Safe places and relationships of trust are key.

- All 3 types of safety – internal, relational, physical/virtual – must be nurtured.
- For physical safety, CYP need access to safe places away from harm
- For relational safety, CYP need access to trustworthy people
- With physical and relational safety, CYP can experience internal safety
- Individuals with a good rapport with CYP should regularly check-in with them as CYP are most likely to disclose to people they trust
- If CYP make a disclosure, interventions must be carefully considered: it is critical not to further disempower CYP

# Key theme

02



## Safe Places + Trust

*"Surround the community  
with a positive set of  
invisible proactive people."*

*"LISTEN LISTEN LISTEN!!!  
I was in so much pain, I need  
someone to listen to me, one  
human talking to another."*

*- Bobbie Galvin*

*"Provide more community base  
drop in centres for children to  
access a safe place which is  
known for a 'hang out' place but  
also offers lots of advice/support  
resources of different topics;  
domestic abuse being one of  
them."*



# Key theme

03



## Heard, in control, supported

It is vital that children and young people are heard, in control, and supported.

To ensure they are *heard*, we must;

- Be present and accessible, create a safe relational space where disclosures could happen
- Ensure openness and non-judgemental support
- Ensure that CYP are listened to and disclosures believed
- See the child / young person as a whole entity and validate their experience
- Confirm that what is happening to them is not right

# Key theme

03



## Heard, in control, supported

It is vital that children and young people are heard, in control, and supported.

To ensure they are *in control*, we must;

- Offer reassurance and clear information on options and what can/will happen with disclosure
- Offer choices and entrust CYP with decisions regarding their abuse
- Co-develop any safety plans
- Offer appropriate educational resources and information on services
- Reinforce the power and rights of CYP

# Key theme

03



## Heard, in control, supported

It is vital that children and young people are heard, in control, and supported.

To ensure they are *supported*, we must;

- Ensure all CYP are in regular contact with a person they trust who listens to them
- When CYP disclose, reassure that what is happening is not their fault, they are not in trouble, they are not alone, and there are people who care and can help
- Provide practical help and information on their options, choices, rights
- Support CYP with referral to services and ensure they have access to children's advocates
- Encourage and help CYP to engage in creative activities to help express their feelings and support their wellbeing

# Key theme

03



## Heard, in control, supported

*"You have to let the child lead things. You have to trust and empower them."*

*"Ask what they want and how they want to be helped. Some may not be ready to be removed from the abusive situation, simply educated on it. Victims with trauma bonds are loyal to their perpetrators and initially the bonds needs to be respected by the professionals before any work can be done."*

*"Someone really seeing you as a person and a human being, and validating your experience, is the most powerful thing that services, organisations and communities can do to help off-radar children experiencing abuse, whether that leads to disclosure or not."*

*"Lack of control is one of the most frightening things about being abused - then if the only option for getting help is to have other people make all the decisions the moment you start talking about what is happening, then this will prevent children from opening up, as well as causing damage when they do so."*

# Key theme 04



## Barriers to disclosure

It is extremely hard for many abused CYP to reach out for help and tell what is happening to them.

- Difficulty recognising that what is experienced is not right and is indeed abuse
- Conflicting emotional attachment and sense of loyalty to the abuser to them being a family member
- Due to age and vulnerability, the most common response to abuse in CYP is freeze
- Internalised messages of shame, secrecy, and threat
- Fear of what will happen after disclosing
- Mistrust of adults; CYP are more likely to disclose to their peers
- Prior attempts that were dismissed or poorly responded to
- Trauma behavior mislabeled 'difficult child' or hidden under 'model child'
- Lack of resources and understaffing

# Key theme 04



## Barriers to disclosure

*"The dismissal of disclosures lead me to not trust the systems that were there to protect me."*

*"Some children are still so trauma bonded to the individual committing the abuse that they are unable to identify and associate with words such as "violence and abuse"*

*"Many professionals though no fault of their own, often do not have time to create close and trusting connections with the young people in their care however without these relationships, children will not make disclosures to you willingly. Teachers are very well placed to create these bonds with their students, however they are under too much pressure to get children through exams and rarely have the time or capacity at this point to have important discussions with even the more obviously troubled children in their classrooms, let alone the polite and steady seeming student sat at the back of the classroom."*

# FINDINGS

# Practical tips

Survivors and allies provided some useful practical information on:



1. **How to communicate with children and young people**



2. **How to use social media and phone-based resources**



3. **How schools can provide support**

# Practical Tip 01



## How to communicate with CYP

- Talk to children and young people directly (i.e. not mediated through adults)
- Take the time to build trust
- Be honest and transparent
- Use language that is age appropriate, understandable, and relatable
- Ask the right questions (e.g. open-ended questions about wellbeing and feeling safe)
- Develop and provide safe words or signals that can be used to alert abuse and/or feeling unsafe
- Offer and respect anonymity and confidentiality (to the greatest extent possible within safeguarding responsibilities)



# Practical Tip 02



## How to use social media / phone-based resources

- Teach CYP how to use social media, online and phone-based tools safely
- Make use of social media platforms that CYP use to communicate important information to them about abuse and seeking safety
- Make support available on social media and other online and phone-based platforms
- Offer virtual and/or phone-based counselling
- Create apps for CYP to access information and support about abuse and seeking safety
- Support digital inclusion by helping CYP access devices, offering emergency credit top-ups, and making phone-based services free

# Practical Tip 03



## How schools can help

- Provide education on violence and abuse as part of standard timetabling (PSHE)
- Intentionally create safe spaces, regularly check-in on children and young people, and offer regular pastoral support
- Be proactive: All school staff (teachers, assistants, librarians, etc.) should seek to identify signs of abuse (clues may be found in the staff's interaction with children and young people or in observing children and young people's behaviour; their interactions with their parents; or their interactions with their peers)
- Provide contact numbers for emotional/psychological support on school material (e.g. on online education home screens)
- Help children and young people access services; signpost, support, help them use school computers to contact services

# Messages of hope

There was agreement among survivors and allies about the key messages of hope to give children and young people experiencing violence and abuse:

- **What's happening to you is not okay**
- **It's not your fault and you are not in trouble**
- **You matter and you have a right to be safe and unharmed**
- **You are not alone**
- **We believe you**
- **Tell someone what is happening so they can help**
- **There is support for you**
- **Things can and will get better**
- **Don't give up, believe in yourself, you are strong**
- **Your abuse doesn't define who you are**



# Reflection 01

## Do we have a shared understanding of what we mean by abuse?

- The professional language around child abuse and safeguarding is not adequate
- **When CYP experience violence and abuse as normal family life, they won't describe it in the language of safeguarding**
- Education on what healthy family life looks like, using the language of feelings (e.g. feeling safe or scared) is easier for CYP to recognise their experiences of abuse and communicate these

# Reflection 02

Do CYP experiencing abuse want to be found and helped?

Is disclosure always a good thing?

- People clearly want abusive behaviour to stop
- Yet, there are concerns that traditional child protection processes don't always lead to the best outcomes: **the care system isn't always caring, the justice system isn't always just**
- Additionally, some people only want for their families to be supported to do better so that further abuse is prevented
- **Ultimately, each child is different and what matters most is to find out what is right for them**

# Reflection 03

## Do current child protection process work? Can we keep children and young people safe?

- Our legal and care systems are not able to provide the best outcomes for all CYP at risk: as well as systemic reform, we need alternative solutions
- There are ways we can ensure CYP are safe or safer
- Healing and recovery is possible with the right support and resources
- **First and foremost we need to create safe spaces, build relationships of trust, and listen to what CYP are telling/showing us**
- **We must take things slowly and follow the child / young person's lead**

# Reflection 04

## Why is it important to listen, give control, and empower CYP?

- It is important because being abused means having no voice, no control, no power: we cannot help CYP by replicating these dynamics
- **We must actively reinforce their voice, control, power: that is the only way out of abuse and toward safety and recovery**

# Reflection 05

## Why don't children and young people disclose?

- What happens is 'normal' in their family so they don't know that things can be different
- They don't often have the language to explain what is happening
- They might try to tell or show but people don't want to hear or see, or can't understand
- They may be afraid of being 'disloyal' or tearing the family apart
- They may be ashamed
- They may not trust adults: they are more likely to tell their peers



# Action01

## Learning

Abuse is often hidden: it is difficult to recognise, but it is imperative that we all know how to.

## Recommendations

- We need to help people recognise abuse – both in their own and in others' experiences
- We need a language to describe what abuse versus healthy relational dynamics look like so that everyone can understand
- We need to train teachers, youth workers, health workers and other frontline staff to understand how to recognise abuse, what to do about it, and how to do handle it well
- We need a wide social conversation to raise awareness and understanding of abuse; how to recognise it and how to respond

# Action 02

## Learning

Reaching out to help is key, yet it must be done sensitively.

## Recommendations

- We need safe physical and online spaces where CYP can go to find refuge, help, support, and information
- We need to build good relationships and make ourselves available so that CYP are able to reach out
- We need to proactively reach out to CYP and not place all responsibility on them to ask for help; there are many reasons why this may be difficult for them
- We need nuanced conversations that grapple with the complexities. For example, barriers that prevent children and young people from asking for help may also be protective barriers that keep them safe

# Action 03

## Learning

We must act to protect CYP from abuse and our actions must be led by them.

## Recommendations

- We need to understand that protecting CYP is everyone's responsibility
- We need to support people to notice and deal with abuse, not turn a blind eye or blame victims
- We need to do more so that everyone knows how to recognise and respond to abuse
- We need to be better at listening to CYP and acting on their wishes and feelings
- We need to consider options carefully
- We need more accessible trauma-informed support
- We need coordinated efforts across agencies and sectors
- We need to invest resources appropriately
- We need to communicate hope
- We need to recognise the strength of CYP
- We need survivors involved in all initiatives and services

# Actions in pandemic times



## Top 3 actions

For families and communities

1. Train people whose role involves visiting houses (e.g., community volunteers, postal workers, delivery workers) to recognise signs of abuse (or code words/signals promoted through public information campaigns)
2. Educate communities on how to spot signs of household violence and abuse, and how to sensitively ask children and young people if they are safe and OK.
3. Educate communities on simple and clear actions of what to do if you suspect possible abuse.

# Actions in pandemic times



## Top 3 actions

For schools, nurseries, childcare settings

1. Educate children and young people about abuse. This includes providing age-appropriate information and resources on supporting at-risk friends.
2. Allocate regular check-ins with a child or young person to teachers who have a good rapport with them to maximise the chances of disclosures.
3. Train teachers and provide them with guidance on how to identify the signs of household violence/abuse, and sensitively ask questions and respond to disclosures.

# Actions in pandemic times



## Top 3 actions

For statutory services, charities, youth organisations

1. Ensure services and organisations are allocated sufficient and ongoing resources to respond to demand.
2. Designate a worker/volunteer to check in with all the young people they work with, particularly those known or suspected to be vulnerable (especially while pandemic-related social restrictions measures are in place)
3. Ensure children and young people can be referred to, or continue to access, workers, services and counselling (by phone or online if it is not possible in person).

# Actions in pandemic times



## Top 3 actions

For government and inter-agency bodies

1. Develop apps/helplines/websites/social media links for children and young people to access freely. These should be easily hidden (from abuser or non-protective parent).
2. Provide refuges (both short-term and long-term) to children and young people who need to find a place of safety away from harm.
3. Run a public information campaign to raise awareness of household violence/abuse during and post-pandemic, to help children, young people, adults, and professionals recognise abuse, and to advertise resources and sources of help.

**Protecting children and young  
people from abuse is everyone's  
responsibility.**



# Thank you

[www.survivorsvoices.org](http://www.survivorsvoices.org)

[www.laurafischer-trauma.co.uk](http://www.laurafischer-trauma.co.uk)

[www.vamhn.co.uk](http://www.vamhn.co.uk)

[www.mcpin.org](http://www.mcpin.org)

