

## Child sexual abuse in institutional contexts

### What does this mean?

Organisations working with children, young people and families in community settings, such as social care services, sports clubs and religious groups.

Abuse may occur in any such context where adults are in positions of power and influence over children and young people.

### The extent of abuse in institutional settings

The Crime Survey for England and Wales 2019 found that, for **1 in 10 adults** who had been sexually abused in childhood, the abuse had been carried out by **a person in a position of trust or authority**.

Child sexual abuse in institutional contexts may also be carried out by young people.

Child sexual abuse in institutional contexts may be perpetrated by a single individual on a single victim, although those who commit abuse in an institutional setting frequently have multiple victims and several people may commit abuse within the same institution.

### Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and Truth Project findings relating to sports:

- Enabling factors were found such as
  - Perpetrators actively approaching parents outside of the sports context to look after or take the children out unsupervised.
  - Perpetrators using sports-related rewards such as allowing the child to play in a more senior team as a method of grooming and coercion.
  - Perpetrators arranging overnight stays with children.
  - A lack of supervision or oversight of adults working in sports (leaders, private coaches or instructors).
  - Physical contact while swimming or in the foam pit in gymnastics.
- Victims reported experiencing psychological and emotional abuse linked to grooming and manipulation alongside sexual abuse.
- Most victims did not disclose their sexual abuse in sports as a child. Barriers – adults failing to respond to behavioural changes or other indicators of concern in children even when they were apparent. Those who did disclose, were dismissed or ignored and subject to victim blaming responses by adults.

- A variety of institutions reacted to disclosures of child sexual abuse by ‘moving on’ perpetrators and not investigating or reporting allegations.
- The protection of personal and institutional reputations were placed above the protection of children.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures that did exist were often not followed and when there were internal or external reviews, recommendations were often not implemented.

The sources of power exerted by abusers may be personal (related to their age, gender, size, personality, reputation or expertise) or associated with their role or position.

The dynamics of abuse in some sporting contexts have been compared to the coercive control involved in domestic abuse. With coaches and trainers controlling elite young athletes’ diet, social activities and sexual behaviour and young people being afraid to disclose sexual abuse for fear of jeopardising their careers.

### **How do we prevent abuse in sports?**

- Robust safeguarding policies and procedures to include staff vetting (safer recruitment).
- Training and education for staff: how to spot the signs and how to respond.
- Awareness raising for children and young people.
- Promotion of open and trusting relationships with children, young people and their parents.
- Monitoring relationships and ensuring clear boundaries for staff and volunteers in their interactions with children and young people.
- A perception of individuals or organisations as ‘prestigious’ is a risk factor and should be guarded against.
- How organisations respond to disclosures from children and young people is key, action against perpetrators and timely support for the children and young people.

### **Key references and links**

[www.iicsa.org.uk](http://www.iicsa.org.uk) - Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse

[www.safeguarding.je](http://www.safeguarding.je) - Safeguarding Partnership Board

[www.thecpsu.org.uk](http://www.thecpsu.org.uk) - Child Protection in Sport Unit

[www.csacentre.org.uk](http://www.csacentre.org.uk) - Centre of Expertise on child Abuse