

NSPCC

Let children know you're listening:

The importance of an adult's interpersonal skills in helping to
improve a child's experience of disclosure

Cecile Gwilym, Senior Policy and Public Affairs Officer

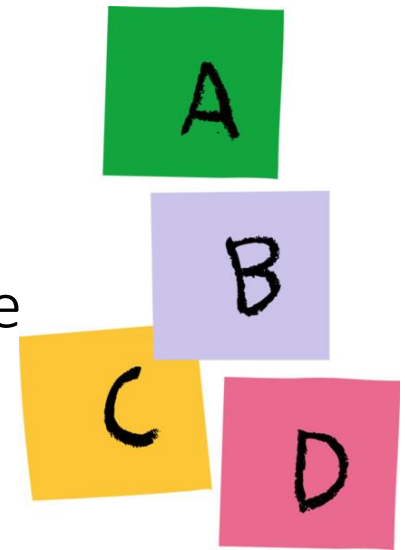
Dr. Sarah Witcombe-Hayes, Senior Policy Researcher

@NSPCC_Cymru @Saaaarah10

EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Session aims

- * To introduce Let Children Know You're Listening Project
- * To share research evidence around young people's disclosure journeys
- * To share what professionals told us about the difficulties they face when helping children through disclosure journeys
- * To share easy to remember prompts about what to do when receiving a disclosure of abuse from a young person



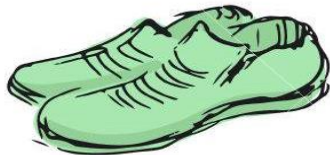
Activity One: “In the coaches shoes”

- * Think about the video you have just watched and put yourself in the coaches shoes
- * How do you think the coach is feeling?
- * Use the shoes to capture how you think the coach feels
- * Stick the shoes on the flip chart paper
- * Feedback to the group



“In your shoes”

- * Now put yourself in your shoes
- * How confident do you/would you feel about receiving a disclosure of abuse from a young person?
- * Chose a shoe and stick it on the appropriate part of the runway to indicate how confident you feel about receiving disclosures of abuse
- * Using the post its, write down what makes you feel confident?



What have children
and young people
told us?



Where does the research evidence sit?

- * Primary focus: disclosures of child sexual abuse
- * Varying definitions of disclosure
- * NSPCC's understanding of disclosure:

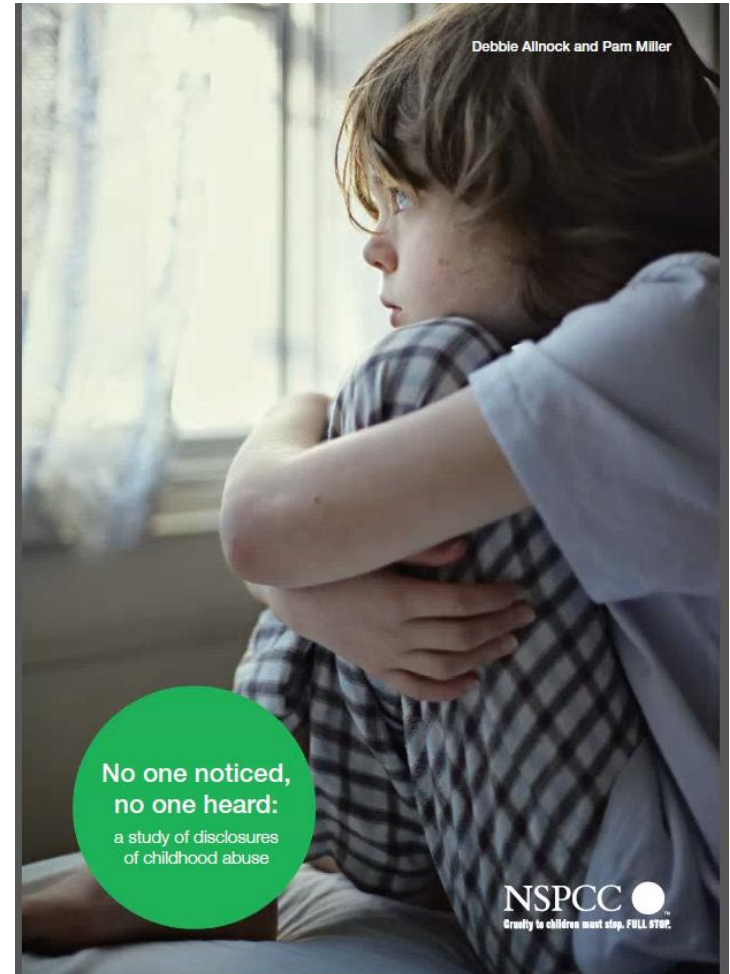
The process of a child starting to share their experiences with others. This process can start before the child is ready to put their thoughts and feelings in order. The process can be verbal and/or non verbal and can take place over a long period of time – it is a journey, not one act or action. This process may actually never lead to an 'allegation' of abuse.

Existing research evidence

- * Children and young people find it very difficult to speak out about their experiences of abuse and neglect
- * Many children delay telling someone about what has happened to them
- * Children & young people disclose abuse & neglect in many different ways
- * Disclosures can be complicated, fragmented & happen over a long period of time
- * Attempts to disclose abuse & neglect can go unrecognised, unheard or ignored

No-one noticed, no one heard

- * Looked at disclosures of child abuse in general, not just child sexual abuse
- * 60 young people (18-24 year olds)
- * Qualitative and quantitative data
- * Explored sequence, mode and purpose of disclosures
- * Barriers & facilitators to disclosures and overall disclosure journeys



Barrier: Isolation

No one to turn to

**“I just had
no one.”**

Suffering abuse left victims feeling isolated
and alone.

Barrier: Anxiety and Fear

Anxiety and fear

**“I certainly, err,
didn’t want to
be found out.”**

Feelings of shame, guilt or embarrassment
stopped victims from telling someone about
abuse sooner.

“I didn't want to cause any distress... I only told them a very small part of the story to start with. And the reaction to that was bad enough”

Barrier: Developmental



“It was just the norm for me sort of so I didn't think anything was sort of wrong with what was going on until I got older”

Barrier: Perpetrator tactics

Abuser's tactics

**“My mum was
so good at
twisting stuff.”**

Victims were manipulated and intimidated
by their abuser.

Barrier: No one listened, no one asked

No one listened, no one asked

“I never went and asked for help, but no one ever asked me.”

The physical and emotional signs of abuse were there, but no one picked up on them.

Barrier: Confidentiality

Confidentiality

**“I guess my
faith was
shattered a bit.”**

Previous experiences where young people's confidentiality was breached shattered their confidence in others.

“If I had known it was completely confidential, I would've phoned Childline. Just so I had someone to talk to”

Promoters : Someone Intervened

“School had known I’d been cutting myself, and people noticed my weight loss.”

Someone noticed injuries or a change in behaviour that triggered them to ask if the young person was being abused. Once asked, young people felt they could talk.

Promoters: Realisation that abuse was wrong

Realisation that abuse was wrong

**“I got the impression
this wasn't what
everyone else
was doing.”**

The realisation that abuse wasn't 'normal'
lead some young people to get help.

Promoters: No longer being able to cope

No longer able to cope

“I just broke down one day. I was sick of getting bullied at school and I was sick of getting bullied at home.”

Some young people simply couldn't cope on their own anymore.

Promoters: Change in the nature of abuse

Change in the nature of abuse

“It got to the point where I couldn’t take it anymore”

When abuse became more violent, aggressive and frequent, it drove young people to reach out and get help.

"He would like step it up a level like gradually and...it just got the point where I couldn't really take anymore"

Promoters: Protecting Others

“I remember just looking across the room to my little sister and just thinking I’ve got to protect her.”

Some were worried that if they didn’t say anything, other children – usually a sibling – could be abused too.

"My brother still had to go [to the babysitter's house] so it was at that time that I tried to tell the what happened...I couldn't say it very well...but, well it did the job. It stopped."

Nature & recipients of disclosure

- * Disclosures of abuse often came a long time after the abuse began
- * Young people told about their abuse in a variety of ways, from direct, verbal disclosures to indirect disclosures through their behaviour or words
- * Initial disclosures most often made to friends and mothers
- * Teachers were more likely than any other professional to receive initial disclosures

Missed opportunities to intervene

Key opportunities were missed because there was a:

1. Failure to notice signs of abuse or self-harm
2. Failure to ask children and young people directly about abuse
3. A poorly handled process of responding to abuse disclosures

Disclosure journey

- * Broadly positive journey = 10%
- * Mixed experiences = 50%
- * Broadly negative journeys = 40%

Key Messages

- * Young people need support from professionals to speak out about abuse
- * Important for young people to be noticed, asked and heard
- * Professionals need to be equipped with tools to help spot signs and symptoms of abuse, engage in purposive conversations, and are confident taking action and support children through the disclosure journey

**What have
professionals told
us?**



Where does the research evidence sit?

- * Limited UK research that explores the professionals views of facilitators and barriers to seeing, hearing and noticing disclosures
- * Limited research that pulls together professionals views and children's views



Our project mission:

To develop a practical resource to help adults who work with children to respond supportively **in the moment** a child chooses to disclose and to interact, and communicate in a way that helps children feel listened to.

We want to create a more positive disclosure journey for children.

Project methodology

- * Focus groups with young people in Wales
- * Brief Evidence Review
- * UK-wide survey of professionals working with children
- * Focus groups with professionals in Wales & London
- * Resource testing with educational professionals and Childline



Coffee Break



What young people told us

Young people told us that they do and don't want professionals to do

Listen to what
we have to say

Don't have
negative body
language

Put yourself in
our shoes

Don't say
something that
you won't
follow through
with

Do what you
say you will do

Not tell young
people what
happens next

What professionals told us: survey results

What actions did you take that helped you notice, hear and help throughout disclosure journey?

Asked the child if they wanted to talk

Asked the child if they were ok

Provided a safe space for the child to talk

What professionals told us: survey results

What difficulties did you face when trying to notice, hear, listen to and help the child throughout their disclosure journey?

Professionals skills/Response:

- * Going at the child's pace
- * Losing trust/rapport if mishandled or break confidentiality
- * Knowing what open ended questions to ask
- * Not becoming emotional/remaining Impartial

Procedural/What happens next:

- * Next steps – not knowing, thinking about, or not informed of
- * Trying to take notes accurately while listening
- * Support after the disclosure but no capacity/resource or not known how to support

Child Barriers:

- * Don't recognise abuse
- * Manipulation by perpetrators make children fear police/social services
- * Language Barriers
- * Child has a disability that makes understanding/hearing disclosure difficult

What professionals told us: survey results

What additional resources would be helpful in your practice and what areas should these resources help you with?

Age appropriate questions to ask

How to interact with the child

How to communicate, have difficult conversations, what language to use

How to reassure child (take child seriously)

How to actively listen

“In the moment” plates exercise

We asked professionals two questions:

Red Plates: What are the difficulties you may face when listening, hearing, noticing children’s disclosures? What could the problems be?

Green Plates: What helps tackle these problems? What do you/would you find helpful when listening, hearing, noticing children’s disclosures?

Fear and
anxiety

Child
centred

Child's
barriers

Active
listening

Body
language

Honesty &
transparency

Things to
say

Questions to
ask

Further Training

What steps to
take if receiving a
disclosure

How to open, continue,
and close the conversation
with a young person

How children
disclose

How to handle
confidentiality

What
questions to
ask

Child-facing resources to
help them communicate
their disclosure

How to spot the signs
and symptoms of abuse
and neglect

Key insights for people who work with children: Interpersonal Skills

1. How to demonstrate you are listening to a child who is disclosing
2. How to reassure a child and show empathy
3. How to put a child in charge of the conversation

How to demonstrate you are listening

Don't distract yourself (e.g. use your phone) (Child from consultation group)

(would like) to see good practice or not good practice when listening to children - this is the most sensitive and hardest part of the child protection journey. Our skills can either open up a child or close them down.....critical we do things right by them at their most vulnerable moment (Survey respondent from education sector)

How to reassure a child and show empathy

Regardless of the training that you receive, there is still an anxiety about handling the disclosure incorrectly due to the focus on potential need for good enough police evidence. This often means there is a barrier to responding to the child/young person in a way that reassures them and helps them feel listened to, heard and understood. (Survey respondent from social care sector)

I understand this might have been difficult for you (Survey respondent from social care sector)

You've shown such courage today (Focus group participant)

How to put a child in charge of the conversation

Provide a place of no pressure and sit with the silences for as long as the young person needs (Survey respondent from education sector)

Other distractions, particularly in a busy school. Phones ringing, pupils knocking on the door etc. Trying to note down the details and give the young person my full attention (Survey respondent from education sector)

Let children know you are listening

NSPCC Learning

Let children know you're listening

The importance of an adult's interpersonal skills in helping to improve a child's experience of disclosure

Helen Baker, Pam Miller, Emily Starr, Sarah Witcombe-Hayes, and Cecile Gwilym

January 2019

EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Let children know you're listening

A **safeguarding resource** to help you show children and young people that, whatever they want to share, you're ready to listen. **There are three simple directions to remember...**

Show you care, help them **OPEN UP**

Give them your full attention and keep your body language open and encouraging. Be compassionate, be understanding and reassure them their feelings are important. Phrases like 'you've shown such courage today' help.

Take your time, **SLOW DOWN**

Respect pauses and don't interrupt them – let them go at their own pace. Recognise and respond to their body language. And remember that it may take several conversations for them to share what's happened to them.

Show you understand, **REFLECT BACK**

Make it clear you're interested in what they're telling you. Reflect back what they've said to check your understanding – and use their language to show it's their experience.



NSPCC Learning

NSPCC 2019. Registered in England and Wales 218820. Registered Charity 115. Photography by Tom Hall. The people and places are made up. NSPCC 2019.

For more training and resources to help protect children visit learning.nspcc.org.uk

Activity Two: Interpersonal skills

**Show you care,
help them **OPEN UP****

**Take your time,
SLOW DOWN**

**Show you understand,
REFLECT BACK**

- * Focusing on open up, slow down & reflect back
- * Use the red plates to write down any barriers you face that you think makes practicing these three skills difficult
- * Use the green plates to write down one change to your practice that could overcome these barriers
- * Feedback to the group

Next Steps...

- * Safeguarding learning sessions across Wales
- * ExChange Workshop
- * Developing a short animation
- * Drafting an academic paper
- * Possible further training & consultancy



Rhoi gwybod i blant eich bod yn gwrando

Let Children Know You Are Listening

Resources available now at

www.nspcc.org.uk/listen

Contact us

Publicaffairs.cymru@NSPCC.org.uk

@NSPCC_Cymru

NSPCC Learning



Ariennir yn Rhannol gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Part Funded by
Welsh Government