

16 Adults who disclose that they have abused a child

16.1 Introduction

16.2 The importance of sharing information

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Adults receiving a therapeutic service from counsellors or therapists may disclose that they have abused a child. Where disclosure of sexual abuse is concerned, it is important to note that abusers may seek therapeutic help strategically, when they suspect that they are about to be investigated or they believe a victim may be about to disclose the abuse: they may use the fact that they have sought help as mitigation for their offences. They may gain pleasure from talking about the abuse or may try to reinforce the perceived acceptability of it. They may attempt to 'groom' the therapist/counsellor in an attempt to ensure that the abuse is not reported, or to continue receiving support from the therapist/counsellor after it has been reported.

16.2 The importance of sharing information

It is erroneous to assume that an adult who discloses involvement in sexual abuse, in the context of a therapeutic relationship, will disclose the full extent of his/her abusive behaviour. It is also erroneous to conclude without a multi-agency risk assessment that because s/he claims the abuse happened in the past, s/he is not actually continuing to abuse currently. It may well be the case that other agencies with a child protection responsibility like the police or social services have additional information already. The whole picture created by putting together what is known to agencies may mean that decisive protective action can be taken in respect of particular children, or that a prosecution will become feasible.

The guidance in Part 3 of these procedures should be followed in relation to confidentiality. The guidance in Part 5 should be followed in relation to referral.

Where sexual abuse or Munchausen syndrome by proxy is concerned, or any other situation where a child or other adult may be placed at further risk by doing so, it will not be appropriate to seek the service user's consent to share information before a referral is made to police or social services.