



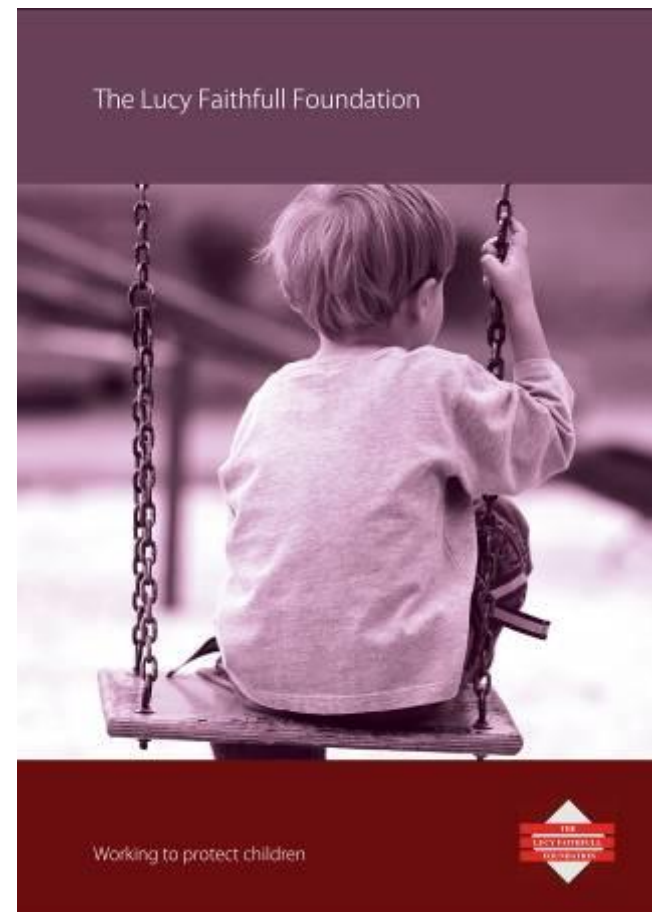
Working to Protect Children

Government Events Preventing Child Sexual Exploitation Conference

Michael Sheath

Lucy Faithfull Foundation

The only UK-wide charity dedicated solely to
tackling child sexual abuse



Are we playing 'Whack a Mole?'



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What proportion of child sexual abuse is reported to the authorities?

- 1. 60%
- 2. 50%
- 3. 25%
- 4. 12.5%
- 5. 10%

There were 88,000 formal complaints of child sexual abuse made to the Police in 2019/20. How many convictions were there?

1. 48,000
2. 40,000
3. 27,000
4. 12,000
5. 3,500

Going upstream..... vs reactive practice



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The 'Reactive' agenda

An experience of sexual abuse, for a child:

- A) Tends to be traumatic, intrusive, and shameful**
- B) Tends to be an experience beyond the child's understanding and recall**
- C) In most cases, will have followed a process of grooming**

Grooming includes:

The provision of gifts, attention, love, affection.

The creation of secrets, dependency, confusion, and ambivalence

The use of seduction or fear

The goal of compliance and inhibition

The sharing and transmission of distortions and blame.

Finkelhor: 'Traumagenic Dynamics'

- **Premature Sexualisation**

The victim learns to associate sex (and possibly arousal) with fear, reward, shame, care, love, punishment, etc, Confusion may follow around the meaning and purpose of sex: associations with further abuse, risk taking, arousal problems.

- **Stigma**

The victim, rather than the perpetrator, carries the shame and guilt, and feels 'dirty.'

Finkelhor: 'Traumagenic Dynamics'

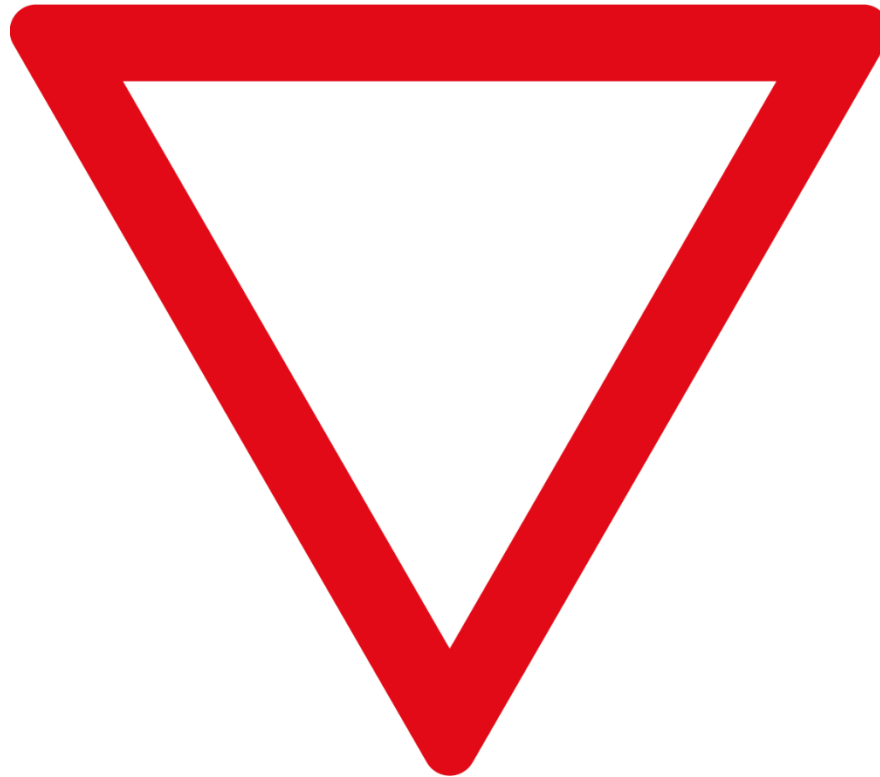
- **Betrayal**

The victim feels an acute sense of betrayal at having a loved and trusted person take advantage of them. Trust in intimate relationships or in 'the authorities' will be diminished.

- **Powerlessness**

The victim feels an acute sense of their own lack of potency and efficacy, their will has been overcome or subverted. Depression, fatalism, lowered self esteem may follow.

Children trigger our reactive system through disclosure:



Disclosure is more easily contemplated than done:

How does a child disclose to a parent who is married to the perpetrator ?

How does a child disclose against a perpetrator the parents are in awe of ?

How does a child disclose against a perpetrator who is loved, feared, or depended upon?

How does a girl disclose when she fears judgements will be made about her 'putting herself at risk?'

How does a man disclose when men who get sexually abused are seen as unmanly, or boys as potential abusers?

How many people are there in England and Wales who are likely to have been sexually abused in childhood?

- **1. 5.5 million**
- **2. 3.1 million**
- **3. 2.3 million**
- **4. 1.75 million**
- **5. 1.5 million**

Issues

- Global, national, and personal **ignorance** about the nature of sexual offending against children
- **Denial**, and what flows from it
- **'Noise', and trauma** in the communities and organisations we work with and are part of

Ignorance

- **We persist in the notion that children are molested by strangers, and that their molestation is invariably violent**
- **We fail to register the proportion of children who are abused by their peers**
- **We remain oblivious to the nature of molestation by women**
- **We stereotype child molesters as 'paedophiles' and monsters, and rapists as strangers.**

In doing so we leave children and women vulnerable to assaults by friends and family, children and adolescents, women, and nice heterosexual men

Denial: a definition

“ A normal and functional defence mechanism that allows us to protect ourselves against something that is painful and distressing”

(American Psychiatric Association, 1994)

Denial

Confronting the reality of child molestation requires us to accept some painful home truths:

- the domestic nature of our abuse**
- the difficulties in identifying and prosecuting offenders**
- the commoditisation of sex, and the objectification of women and children**
- the sexualisation of youth, 'pre grooming.'**
- the ubiquity of pornography and abusive imagery**

Trauma, and 'noise'

Significant proportions of the people we work with have experience of:

- **Childhood abuse: physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect**
- **Residential care**
- **Attachment difficulties**
- **Learning difficulties**
- **Domestic and sexual violence**

We need 'trauma informed' interventions

Trauma and 'noise'

'Noise' consists of pre existing views, schema and prejudices, which act as a filter upon 'new' information and perspectives.

The manifestations of noise are often seen as deliberate resistance, or ignorance, although it usually operates and influences at a pre conscious level.

The origins of noise usually reside in trauma: trauma does not necessarily lead to insight.

Accommodation Syndrome

- 1. Secrecy.** Sexual abuse takes place in conditions of secrecy and shame. The silence of the victim is ensured through fear, obligation, affection, self blame.
- 2. Helplessness.** Victims feel impotent, that they cannot manage the environment or their relationships, and therefore lack efficacy
- 3. Entrapment and Accommodation.** The child begins to adopt and accept the schema and point of view of the perpetrator

Accommodation Syndrome

4. **Delayed, conflicted, or unconvincing disclosure.** The child offers an incoherent or implausible account of abuse, fraught with anxiety and inconsistency.

5. **Retraction.** The process of disclosure is fraught with guilt, anxiety and ambivalence. Reactions by 'the system', including the family and the safeguarding apparatus can lead to a retraction and denial of the original claim.

Implications

- **Sophisticated perpetrators are often extremely astute in respect of their ability to identify and exploit trauma and noise in the organisations, women and families they target**
- **They often create dependency and confusion in organisations, mothers and children, including targeted and non targeted children and adults**
- **Societal responses to sexual abuse and rape are often based on prejudice, denial, and distortion**

So...

- **If our society remains ignorant about the realities of child sexual abuse**
- **If we remain in denial about the true nature of our offenders**
- **If our prejudices and personal feelings interfere with a meaningful engagement with the problem**

We will leave responsibility for reporting, identifying and apprehending abusers with the children who are abused by them: this is at the heart of the reactive agenda

The Prevention Agenda and Framework: Smallbone and Wortley

Primary prevention: Avoids the development of sexual abuse in our communities

Secondary Prevention: Detects problematic behaviours, and offers opportunities for early intervention

Tertiary Prevention: Responds to identified abuse and abusers, and seeks to prevent its recurrence, or minimise its impact

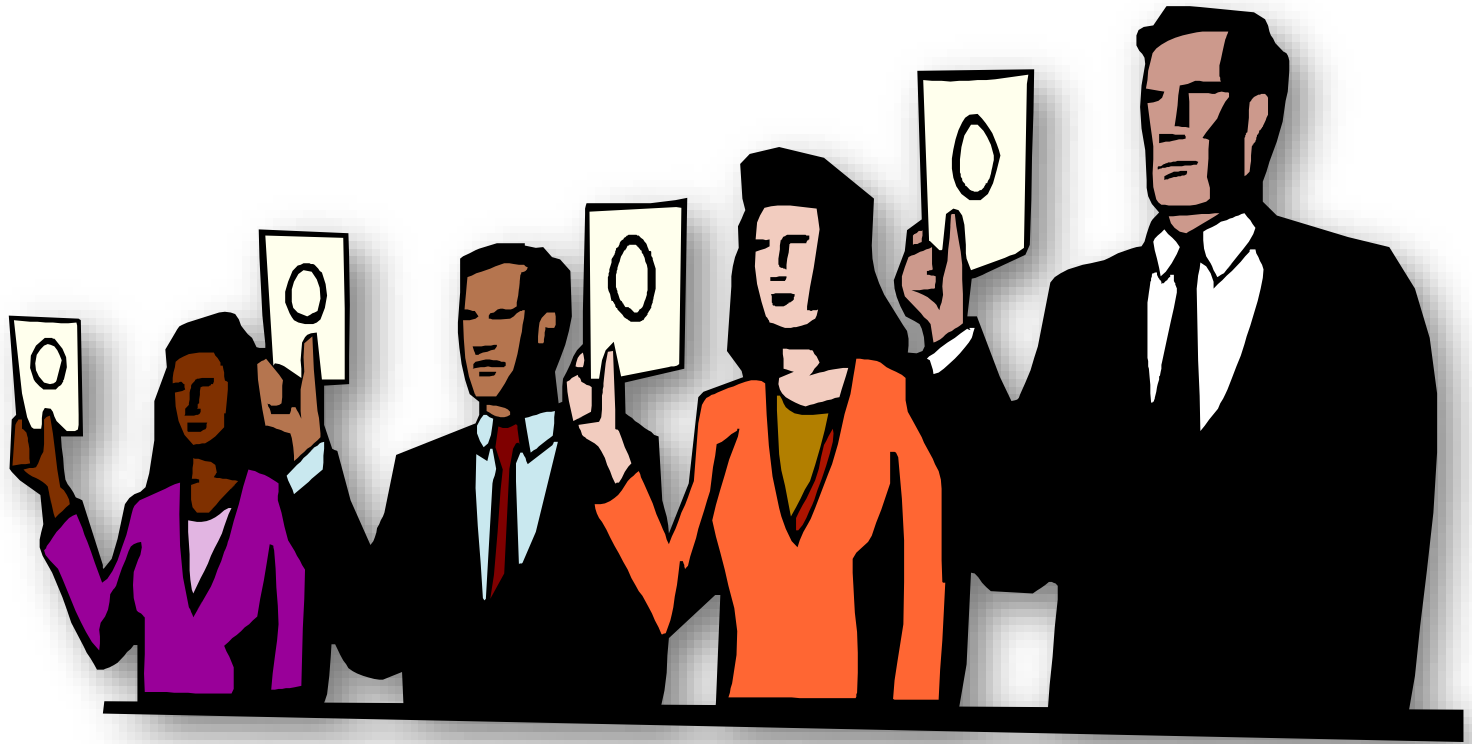
The Prevention Agenda: Sexual Abuse

	Primary prevention	Secondary prevention	Tertiary prevention
<i>Offenders</i>			
<i>Victims</i>			
<i>Communities/ Families</i>			
<i>Situations</i>			

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Thank you, for your attention



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