



# campaign report

**Every single day** RECEIVES  
**a child goes without**  
**support after abuse**  
**is another day**  
**struggling to**  
**overcome their**  
**ordeal.**

CLOSER TO THEM  
REBUILDING THEIR LIVES

**NSPCC**

EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR



## We have a choice about how a child's life is shaped after abuse

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**A Force for Change is NSPCC's group of young experts who have direct experience of these issues and have worked with us to shape the It's time campaign.**

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"Abuse seriously damages children and young people. It's so important that if a child has experienced abuse, they are able to get the right support to overcome it, because it can devastate them for years to come. They deserve to feel happy and not scared, just like other young people. Without support, they risk developing mental illness. They might also feel that they "deserve" their abuse and allow other people to abuse them.

We need to make sure support is available when children and young people want it, where they want it and most importantly, how they want it. It cannot be a one-size-fits-all system. We need the system to adapt to the young person's needs so they feel comfortable. If the young person doesn't feel comfortable, then what is the point?

Our message to government is simply that we need to make sure that this support is in place, to help young people overcome the trauma of their abuse. We cannot let victims of abuse suffer in silence. When you tell someone about what is happening, it sometimes feels like you're snitching or telling on someone and it's really scary. But if the support is there, we can tell these young people that they are safe and no longer have to be afraid. Nobody has to live in fear.

As children and young people who have experienced abuse, we want to be treated gently and with respect - we're still 'normal' young people, please help us recover and lead fulfilled lives."

# Introduction

## **It's time we demand that every child receives the support they need.**

Every year over half a million children are abused in the UK; the equivalent of two children in every primary school class. The support they receive following abuse can mean the difference between overcoming their trauma, or a life shaped by the horror of their experiences.

Yet we leave the majority without the support and care they so desperately need. We'd love to be able to tell you precisely how many children are left without help, but the heartbreaking reality is, as a society, we are failing young victims so badly that we are not even keeping count. We have already identified tens of thousands who aren't getting the support they need. But we know it's a lot more.

## **It doesn't have to be this way. We have a choice about how a child's life is shaped after abuse.**

By giving them the care and support they need now, we can help them to break free from the trauma of their ordeal. It's up to all of us to demand change.

We need decision makers at all levels to better prioritise the needs of victims of abuse. As a first step we need to ensure that the money that is supposed to be available for mental health services is used to deliver the right support to abused children; so that they receive the help they need, when they need it, for as long as they need it.

But that will only happen if we treat every single day that a child does not receive care, as a day too many. NSPCC is launching this campaign because every child deserves the best chance to rebuild their life after abuse.

## **It's time we gave it to them.**

### **What do we mean by support?**

Abuse and neglect affects children differently so the support available needs to reflect this. Therapeutic support means services provided by a range of trained professionals to address the trauma they have experienced and its impact on their lives. This can include: talking therapies, family therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, play based therapy, counseling and psychotherapy.

# How many children are abused in the UK?

Abuse robs children of their childhood. Without help, the scars of abuse can last a lifetime. Child abuse is any action by another person – adult or child – that causes significant harm to a child. It can be physical, sexual or emotional, but just as often it's about not providing the basic needs that all children need – including love, care and attention.

Any type of abuse, no matter what form it takes, can have long-lasting and severe consequences for children. Vulnerable children will often experience more than one type of abuse alongside other difficulties in their lives. Generally, abuse happens over a period of time and we are increasingly seeing it happen online.

Sadly, children who have experienced abuse and neglect are all too often invisible to society. Child abuse is frequently hidden from view, with many children too young, too scared or too ashamed to tell anyone about what is happening.

As a nation we have been shocked in recent years by the child abuse scandals that have come to light. From the high-profile cases of celebrity abusers such as Jimmy Savile and scandals of large-scale child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, to the thousands of cases that never make the headlines, there have been too many examples of our society's collective failure to protect children.

- We estimate that more than 500,000 children in the UK each year are abused by a parent or a guardian – the equivalent to two children in every primary school class<sup>1</sup>.
- One in twenty children in the UK has been sexually abused<sup>2</sup>.
- More than 42,000 children in England are looked after in the care system, specifically due to abuse or neglect<sup>3</sup>.

Thankfully more children who have been abused are finding the courage to come forward. Across the UK, there was a significant increase in the number of reported cases of sexual abuse in 2013-14<sup>4</sup>. In 2014/2015, 29,000 children contacted ChildLine to discuss abuse<sup>5</sup>.

The NSPCC's long history of researching abuse, and reaching out to and helping children who have been abused, has taught us that the right support, at the right time, is a critical part of helping children to move on from those experiences. As well as concentrating on how we improve the system to better protect children and young people, as a society we have a collective responsibility to support every child and young person following abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> Harker et al (2013) How safe are our children?

<sup>2</sup> Based on NSPCC research with 11-17 year olds – Radford et al (2011) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today.

<sup>3</sup> Children looked after in England including adoption: 2014 to 2015, National Statistics

<sup>4</sup> NSPCC (2015) How safe are our children?

<sup>5</sup> NSPCC (2015) "Always there when I need you": ChildLine review: what's affected children in April 2014 – March 2015.

# The impact of child abuse

*"Your mind becomes a prison. In a prison you always see the same walls, the same things prevent you doing things."*

*"As I grew older and understood more about my parents' addictions, I felt more and more isolated and different from my friends. Even though no one knew about their addictions, I still felt ashamed."*

We estimate that more than half a million children are abused in the UK each year <sup>6</sup>. Children who have been abused are more likely to experience depression, anxiety and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder as well as self-harming and suicide. In addition to the legacy of trauma brought on by abuse, it can have a devastating effect on children's development, with lasting consequences for their mental, physical and emotional health – as well as for their relationships and education.

If someone has been abused before, it is more likely that they will suffer abuse again, beginning a vicious cycle. Their ability to get a job or be a good parent might be inhibited. They may develop mental illness, a substance dependency, criminal behaviour – or in some cases become abusive themselves. So experiencing abuse as a child can have long-lasting effects into adulthood, leaving our whole society to face the consequences. Because of these effects, child sexual abuse alone cost the UK £3.2 billion in 2012, arising from mental and physical health problems, drug and alcohol misuse, unemployment and criminal justice costs<sup>7</sup>.

We know that child abuse is not inevitable and it is up to all of us to help prevent it from happening. We also know that when it does occur, we must be ready to provide the expert help that children need to deal with trauma. With high-quality therapeutic support, children and young people can rebuild their lives. Where we have already failed to protect children from abuse, we cannot fail them again by ignoring the impact that abuse has on their lives.

*"Support helps lessen the impact so you can control how you deal with things."*

*"It is about rebuilding freedom of mind, so you don't constantly dwell on it and have it going through your mind. You're free."*

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<sup>6</sup> Harker et al (2013) How safe are our children?

<sup>7</sup> Saied-Tessier (2014) Estimating the costs of child sexual abuse in the UK

# Real life stories – how the right support can help turn lives around

*These are true stories but names have been changed to protect identities*

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## **Sophie was neglected throughout her childhood, but therapeutic support helped her come to terms with her experience**

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My experiences of being neglected as a child are with me every day. No one was there most of the time and, even when they were there, they weren't properly there as they were out of it. It was just hell. My parents both used drugs and when I was growing up there was no one there to do the basic things that a child needs, like cooking meals. There was never any food in the house, mum always thought that I'd eaten it and would call me a pig. I just kind of stopped eating as I felt guilty. I was often left by myself and I felt so lonely, even when they were there.

I often felt low and one of my lowest points was when I tried to go and speak to my mum and dad about their drug use. They just kept yelling and yelling, so I left. I didn't know what I was going to do, it was like everyone hated me and thought I was lying and I felt that I was completely alone. I felt like I couldn't tell anyone. I felt they weren't going to stop and I just felt like I was just stuck in it. It really did feel that there was nothing at that point. It felt completely hopeless. I took an overdose as I felt there was no way out. I wanted them to listen to me.

When I was finally referred for support it gave me the confidence to open up and not let everything get bottled up inside of me. I realised that what I was experiencing wasn't normal, that it wasn't OK. Now I'm living in my own flat and planning to go to university. My life could have been much worse if I hadn't got help.

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## **It took three years for Tia to be offered therapeutic support that helped her cope with her experience of sexual abuse**

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My dad was always in and out of prison. When I was 13, he got his own place and I started staying there at the weekends. That's when the abuse started. It continued for about three or four months. In the year that followed, I began self-harming and tried to kill myself three times.

A month or two after my first overdose, my mum organised for me to see someone from a local child sexual exploitation service. We didn't talk much about what had happened with my dad. I'm glad because I wasn't ready and I think it might have made things worse. I was referred to a mental health service for young people too but it just wasn't the right support. It was a scary place. They talked to me like I was a child.

By this point I was drinking and smoking weed every day. I started staying out overnight and sometimes didn't go home for days or weeks. I was raped twice. I remember being in the shower and just scrubbing my skin. I've got blotches all over me from where I've ripped my skin off. I started seeing a counsellor called Angela when I was 16. She changed my life. When I was 17, I took coke heavily for two or three months and would get angry. There were so many times when I would come home covered in blood and I couldn't remember why.

Angela gave my life some worth. If I hadn't had her support I'd still be on drugs. She helped me to accept the things that I can't change and do what I need to do to make it ok. Now I've got my own place, I'm going to college and I've applied to university. If I'd received support earlier, then it might have stopped me putting myself into risky situations. But I'm not letting those men define the way I am, or turn me bad.





# Therapeutic support for children who have experienced abuse

The scarcity of support for children and young people who have experienced abuse is alarming and demands immediate attention. We receive consistent reports about a lack of provision and the difficulties in accessing support through Childline and our helpline, our direct work with children through our services, our engagement with practitioners and services, and our own research. Although there are clear indications of unmet need among children who have been abused, we can't say exactly how much additional provision is required because there have been limited efforts nationally to monitor the provision of therapeutic services for children who have experienced abuse or to understand the level of demand for support.

*"I requested counselling at school to help me cope with the investigation, court case and after-effects of the abuse. I wasn't offered specialist therapeutic support at any point."*

## What we do know about access to support

There is widespread concern among GPs, teachers, social workers and other health and education professionals about the lack of services to support children who have experienced abuse and neglect. The overwhelming majority of professionals responding to an NSPCC survey in 2015 reported a lack of support for children who have been abused.

- 98% of professionals reported there was not enough therapeutic support for children who have been abused.
- 97% of professionals reported that there was not enough Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) support.
- Professionals with experience or awareness of referring children to therapeutic services said that it had got harder to access these services in the last five years, both for children with diagnosable mental health problems (78%) and children who may not have diagnosable mental health problems (87%)<sup>8</sup>.

In 2013/14, we estimate that there were more than 17,000 children in care in England with a diagnosable mental health disorder who were not receiving support<sup>9</sup>. The majority of children in care first entered the system because of abuse and neglect.

Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are struggling to cope with demand – one in five children referred to CAMHS are denied a service, and the average waiting time between referral and assessment ranges from just a week in some areas to more than 26 weeks in others – with an average waiting time of nearly two months<sup>10</sup>. Professionals have reported to the NSPCC that waiting times in some areas are measured in years not months. This is a significant proportion of a child's life to be waiting for support.

<sup>8</sup> Survey of 1,308 children's health, social care and education professionals assessing current provision of therapeutic services for children who have experienced abuse and neglect, November/December 2015. NSPCC.

<sup>9</sup> Bazalgette, L., Rahilly, T. and Trevelyan, G. (2015) Achieving emotional wellbeing for looked after children: a whole system approach. [London]: NSPCC. (Impact and evidence series)

<sup>10</sup> NSPCC FOI of CAMHS provision 2015, <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/fighting-for-childhood/news-opinion/postcode-lottery-of-waiting-times-in-local-mental-health-services/>

<sup>11</sup> MYE2: Population Estimates by single year of age and sex for local authorities in the UK, mid-2014

<sup>12</sup> Department of Health and NHS England (2015), Future in mind, available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/414024/Childrens\\_Mental\\_Health.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414024/Childrens_Mental_Health.pdf) p. 29

The increasing scarcity of support has been reflected in the contacts to ChildLine from children who have problems accessing services. These increased by 124 per cent between 2013/14 and 2014/15.

Problems accessing mental health support are unsurprising – children aged from 0 to 19 years account for 24 per cent of the population<sup>11</sup> but only receive six per cent of mental health spending<sup>12</sup>.

Not all children who have been abused and neglected will experience diagnosable mental health issues. But they may still need support to address their experience of abuse and the impact it has had on them. The available information about the scale, range and scope of wider therapeutic support is even more limited than that available about CAMHS.

We know that in terms of sexual abuse alone there is a large gap between the prevalence of abuse and the availability of support. In 2009, among the services for children who had experienced child sexual abuse, 81 per cent were operating waiting lists<sup>13</sup>.

## **How we are failing children who have experienced abuse and neglect**

We can't say how much additional provision is required to meet the unmet needs for therapeutic support of children who have been abused, because as a society we are failing young victims so badly that we aren't even keeping count of them.

Despite the high profile of issues related to child abuse, there is no official national data on the number of children and young people who have been abused who receive support to overcome their trauma. Information about the number of children who have been abused and the therapeutic support available to them is not routinely captured by local agencies. As a result, service commissioners do not have a clear understanding of the scale of need, the services

*As a safeguarding nurse with 100 per cent of my caseload on a child protection plan having experienced significant abuse, it is disappointing to say that the children I have referred have not been accepted by CAMHS due to thresholds [level of need required to access a service]."*

*Health visitor, South West*

*"When you access a service you then play ping pong around all the services before they all conclude they cannot assist."*

*Adoptive parent, East of England*

*"The waiting lists are so long, when young people need services promptly. Services are all in a formal setting too. Community-based work would support hard-to-engage young people far better."*

*Social worker, West Midlands*

*"There does not seem to be a clear idea of what services are needed and by whom. It is a postcode lottery."*

*Adoptive parent, South West*

<sup>13</sup> Allnock, D. et al. (2009) Sexual abuse and therapeutic services for children and young people: the gap between provision and need: full report. London: NSPCC.



currently on offer and the gaps they need to fill. Children are being left to cope without the right professional support.

Where there is support available, it is often poorly tailored to meet the needs of children and young people who have experienced abuse and neglect. For example, many CAMHS don't support children who have been abused and neglected as their needs are considered to be specialist. Since specialist training is required for practitioners, many children are turned away.

Research regarding best practice in therapeutic support for abused children is under-developed, which means that we don't always know what will work best. We must improve our evidence base for child-centred, therapeutic support for children who have experienced abuse. Only through supporting this research will it become possible for commissioners to ensure that there are the most appropriate services for children in their area.

*"This is a very misunderstood group of children/young people (clinically). They often receive diagnoses that are oblivious to their underlying experience of themselves (they are traumatised first and foremost). They are sexually traumatised and they often are seen only as ADHD, conduct disorder etc. It is a disservice to them if we do not find ways of engaging with them, with their experience and their experience of us as professionals."*

*Health care professional, South West*



# What needs to change?

Our vision is that every child and young person who has been abused gets the help they need to rebuild their life. In particular, we want every child to get the therapeutic support they need to overcome the trauma of their abuse.

The changes required to achieve this vision are complex, challenging and urgent. They will need long-term commitment from across the children's sector and at every level of government in each of the four nations of the UK. As a first step we need to ensure that the money that is supposed to be available for mental health services is used to deliver the right support to abused children; so that they receive the help they need, when they need it, for as long as they need it.

The issues we highlight in this report affect children throughout the UK. However, the funding and commissioning of therapeutic support is devolved. The priorities in bold below apply to all UK Governments, beneath we set out what this means in England.

Our main priorities are:

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## 1. More support

**Increasing the long-term investment in therapeutic services for children who have been abused and neglected to better reflect the scale of abuse and its impact on children's lives.**

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To start with, we ask that:

- additional services for these children are prioritised within the £1.25 billion already committed by government to children's mental health over the next five years and within the £600 million funding for mental health pledged in the Comprehensive Spending Review 2015;
- therapeutic support for abused children is prioritised within existing local budgets.

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## 2. Clear vision

**Setting a clear vision and standards for the planning, commissioning and delivery of support services for children who have experienced abuse and neglect.**

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To start with, we ask the Government:

- to develop national guidance on the provision of specialist support services for abused and neglected children;
- in their role as corporate parent, to ensure that looked-after children have automatic mental health assessments on entry to care and regularly during their childhood and follow-up support as needed.

## 3. Better evidence

**Improving the evidence base around therapeutic support for abused children, including demand, provision and best practice.**

To start with, we ask that:

- data about the numbers of abused and neglected children receiving services is collected and published;
- the Government commissions further research on what works to improve emotional wellbeing and mental health after abuse and invests in evidence-based services.

It's clear that the scale of reform demanded will require the determined focus and collaboration of a range of decision makers at a national and local level across the UK. We know it is ambitious and might take a number of years to achieve. The NSPCC will continue to fight for every child who has been abused, and hold decision makers to account for as long as it takes.

# Principles of child-centred support

A *Force for Change* is our group of young experts who have direct experience of these issues. In partnership with the NSPCC, they have developed principles that should underpin future services to support children and young people who have been abused.

**Every child and young person deserves support which:**

- \* is from a professional who understands the nature of abuse and the help they need**
- \* is from a professional whom they trust and can have an honest relationship with**
- \* is from a professional who knows their story and whom they can rely on**
- \* is built around their needs – when they need it, for as long as they need it, at times that fit into their lives**
- \* is available in a space that is safe and reassuring.**

*“You want support from the same person, someone that understands the words you’ve said, not someone else who reads notes and understands them differently.”*

*“The lady who did the therapy just concentrated on the self-harm and depression. For me that was just addressing the symptoms, not the problem.”*

*“Choice is important, people need to know what is available and why. You should get to choose.”*

*“The room should be comfortable and spacious – not like a hospital. There should be artwork...and children’s rooms”*

We demand that every child receives  
the support they need after abuse.  
Join us **[nspcc.org.uk/time](https://nspcc.org.uk/time)**

#ItsTime

