

# Safeguarding Vulnerable People Partnership

## Learning from Operation Meteor and Child Sexual Abuse

### Briefing Note

This Briefing Note follows on from the Learning Event held 4 March 2019. Presentations from that event are available here:

<http://www.wiltshirescb.org.uk/child-sexual-abuse/>

Operation Meteor was the biggest investigation into Child Sexual Abuse ever in Wiltshire. It concerned the activities of someone called Peter Daniels. Known as 'Uncle Peter', Daniels lived in the Alderbury area and groomed a significant number of young girls in his neighbourhood. He was seen as a friendly, kind, generous man locally and families trusted their children with him. He never came to the attention of local schools, the police nor children's services as someone of concern. Yet he sexually abused at least 22 young children over a nine-year period and is now serving six life sentences.

Operation Meteor was a major and very successful investigation. It was led by the police and children's social care in Wiltshire, supported by local schools and health services. The scale of the investigation is hard to quantify. The investigation addressed, ten years of offending, multiple victims and numerous families groomed. The Police trawled through over 600,000 indecent images and 4,000 videos from his computer, identifying hundreds of potential new victims.

Daniels was prosecuted for abusing two children in the first investigation to secure an early conviction. Many more victims had been identified and Daniels was convicted of abusing 26 victims in the second prosecution. Thirty-four children were formally interviewed under Achieving Best Evidence guidance (ABE).

This was a time-consuming, detailed and, for those involved, traumatic and difficult investigation. It was conducted with the utmost professionalism and dedication and, most importantly, with the needs of the children at the centre throughout. One of the prime reasons for this briefing is to share information about Operation Meteor across the Wiltshire safeguarding network and to acknowledge the skills and expertise of all those involved under the leadership of Jen Salter (Children's Services) and Nicki Davey (Wiltshire Police).

# Learning Points

## What has happened to CSA?

This operation raises broader issues about Child Sexual Abuse (CSA).

For a number of reasons, CSA has dropped off of our collective radars in recent years. In 1998, nationally 20% of all Child Protection Plans (or the register as it was then) were for CSA. In 2017-18, that number had fallen to just over 4%. This decline was recognised early in Wiltshire which is why the LSCB commissioned a CSA sub-group in 2016.

Yet a report published by the Office of the Children's Commissioner, Protecting children from harm, 2015, estimates that over one million children experience some form of CSA. The report also sets out that there can be a significant delay between the time of the abuse and when a disclosure is made and that 26% of victims did not realise they were being abused until later in their lives. Many children and young people are not able to disclose until their adulthood if at all. However, we must remember that no disclosure does not mean no abuse.

There is no reason to believe that the prevalence of CSA has dropped in our society. There are a number of reasons for the apparent fall in numbers of children known to us for CSA:

- the impact of the Cleveland Inquiry (1988)
- a growing focus on Child Sexual Exploitation
- the powerful ability of abusers to go undetected through evermore skilled grooming techniques.

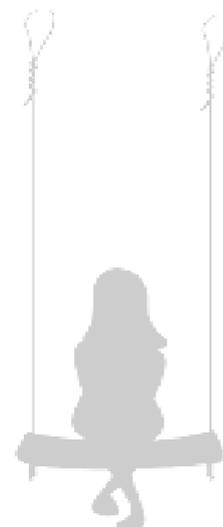
## Grooming

**Grooming** is the ability of abusers to draw children into abusive relationships without arousing the suspicions of their families, of agencies who might be involved and by preventing children from disclosing what is happening to them.

When someone grooms a child, they will use a variety of techniques, including:

- appearing 'ordinary', being socially invisible (they do not stand out)
- making threats to the victims
- getting the victims to protect the perpetrators from punishment
- using bribery, gifts, treats
- normalising the behaviour
- blaming the victims for encouraging the behaviour in the abuser
- making the victim believe they will get in to trouble if they say anything

Daniels used a combination of these techniques very successfully for years. The failure to spot it was not a failure of care by parents or agencies, but more a measure of his expertise.



## CSA - Signs and Symptoms

Some of the signs a child may be being sexually abused are:

- changing moods and behaviour e.g. aggression, wetting the bed
- urinary infections
- social withdrawal and distancing from friends / family
- sexualised behaviour
- avoiding the abuser or seeming afraid
- physical problems e.g. sore genitals or developing sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- giving subtle hints or clues so as not to reveal it outright

The signs and symptoms of grooming are many and varied and often they are not by themselves conclusive of Child Sexual Abuse taking place. A whole range of other factors **might be** indicative of CSA. The behaviour of adults **might be** indicative of grooming activity.

## Supporting Practice

Research indicates that children will often not disclose because:

- they are not sure they will be believed
- they might be blamed for their part in the abuse
- they will bear the responsibility of their family breaking up.

The single most important message from this briefing is that **as practitioners you must be alert to the possibility that observed behaviours in both children and adults might be evidence of CSA taking place.**

If you suspect it ...

- explore it further
- look for other evidence
- offer children the opportunity to talk generally about life at home
- talk it through in supervision and with your manager.

## Further reading and practice guidance

[Intra-familial Child Sexual Abuse: Risk factors, Indicators and Protective Factors - Practice Tool](#), Research in Practice – this tool contains helpful information to help assess concerns in relation to CSA and you can access the sections that are most helpful to you

[The impacts of child sexual abuse: a rapid evidence assessment, Summary Report, July 2017](#) , [Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#)

[Measuring the scale and changing nature of CSA and CSE](#) , Scoping Report, London Metropolitan University

[Exploring the relationship between neglect and adult-perpetrated intra-familial child sexual abuse](#), Research in Practice, July 2016

Further guidance and resources can be found at [www.wiltshirescb.org.uk/child-sexual-abuse](http://www.wiltshirescb.org.uk/child-sexual-abuse)